From the pages of THE SANDMAN

Lucifer

BOOK FOUR

"An original take on the forces of good, evil and beyond evil."
— Publishers Weekly

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Carey

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P. Craig Russell
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VERTIGO

Lucifer

BOOK FOUR

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LUCIFER BOOK FOUR

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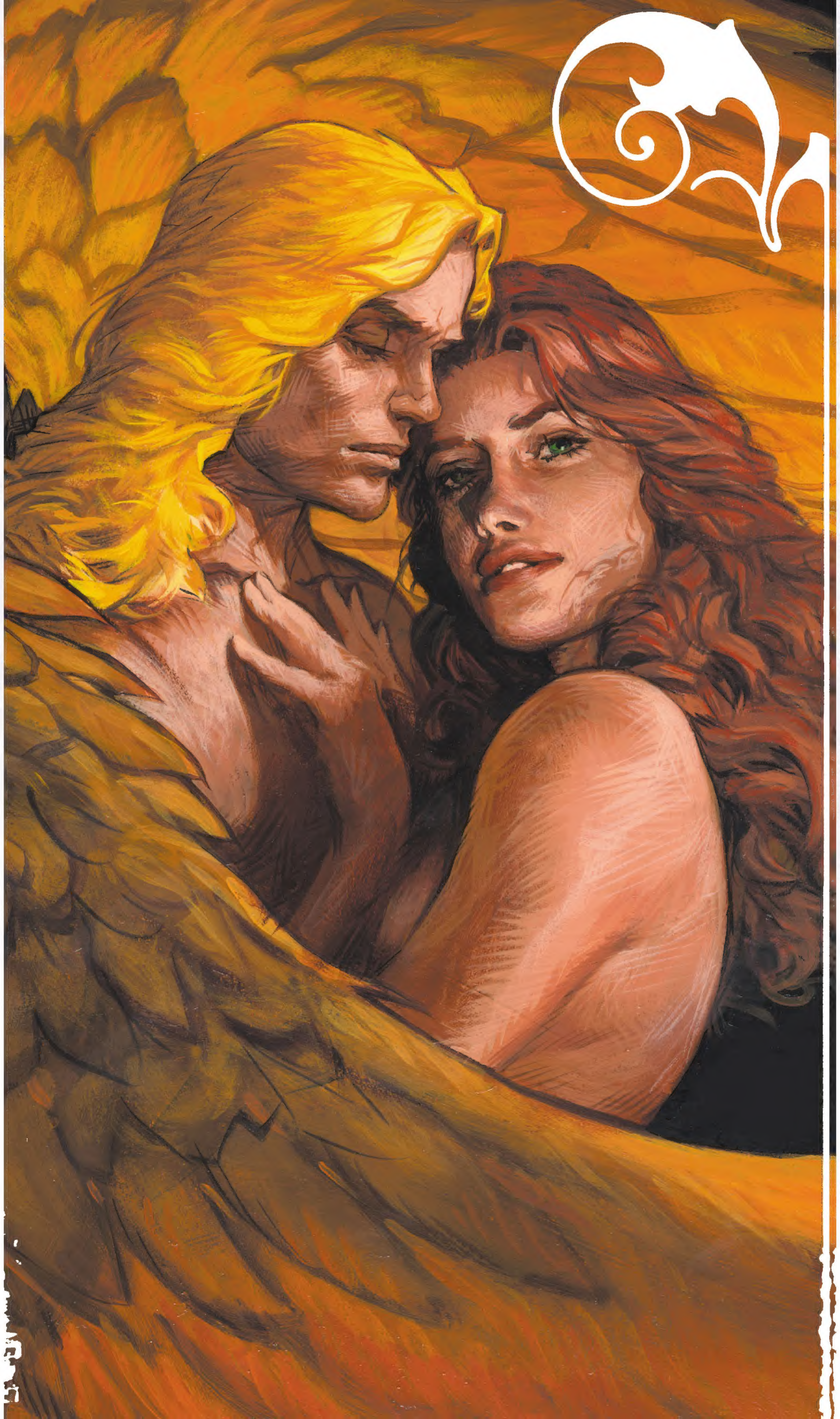

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INTRODUCTION

For a guy who never worked on Neil Gaiman's THE SANDMAN, I've spent a lot of time working in the sandbox that Neil created for it — maybe more than any other artist working in comics. For starters, I was the primary artist on the ongoing THE BOOKS OF MAGIC series, featuring Neil's pre-Harry Potter boy wizard, Timothy Hunter (I even wrote the title for its last two years). After that, I fell into LUCIFER, a soon-to-be-epic story based on Neil's fabulous version of the Fallen One from the pages of THE SANDMAN that was written by a (then) relatively unknown writer named Mike Carey. I'm not sure why I gravitate to this sort of material, or why it gravitates to me, but I can hazard a guess or two:

1) I like big complicated stories that are about something that feels meaningful.

2) I like it when the story makes you question and consider things in a new light, and demands that you pay attention.

You can't find those sorts of stories very often in superhero comics, but you can find them more often than not at Vertigo, and you can always find them in LUCIFER. That's why I like working with Mike Carey, and why I continue working with him on our current ongoing series THE UNWRITTEN; he likes the same sort of stories as I do, and he's so damned good at writing them. They're stories with meat on their bones. They have substance, and you might find yourself thinking about them long after you're done reading them.

When I looked over the issues collected in this volume (having worked on them, I've probably never been able to experience them as a normal reader does), I was instantly struck by how well they are written, how many great lines there are, and how many great character moments. I don't think anyone in comics writes better dialogue than Mike, and he does it without being flamboyant or insistently demanding your attention. He does it by following the easier-said-than-done rule that characters in stories should say things that are more interesting than what we hear in everyday life.

But since this is the fourth volume of the collected LUCIFER that you're reading, chances are that you already know all this. So instead of belaboring my point, I'll tell you something that you may *not* know

(I certainly didn't until I started writing this intro): Mike and I are one of the all-time greatest writer/artist teams in comic book history — or at least among the most prolific. Together, we have created well over 125 full-length comic books. When I realized this, I thought that that had to be close to the top issue count for a writer/artist team at Vertigo, but after looking into it I discovered that cracking the 100-issue barrier is a rare feat in *all* of comics — and that those who have done it are some pretty special combos: Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, Robert Kirkman and Charlie Adlard, Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso, Bill Willingham and Mark Buckingham. And when I put the question out on Facebook, I got Marv Wolfman and Gene Colan, Marv Wolfman and George Pérez, Brian Bendis and Mark Bagley, Mark Evanier and Sergio Aragonés. There are more, and I can pretty much guarantee they're all comic book gold. That's because you have to build something pretty special to do that many issues together.

Mike and I clicked from the first issue we did together, and we continue to click thousands of pages later. But there are things that change along the way when you become two sides of the same storytelling coin. You each understand what the other is after, and you know how to get there. Mike knows that I might completely ignore the staging that he includes in his scripts, but he also knows that his staging may be the thing that acts as a springboard to take me to a better place. I love surprising a writer with something that he didn't ask for which turns out to be exactly what he wanted. I imagine that it must be frustrating sometimes to write stories that someone else draws — to get invested in a picture in your mind and then see it realized in quite a different way. But I think that what Mike and I succeeded at in LUCIFER and THE UNWRITTEN is keeping each other surprised and engaged in the story. We might have a long conversation about an upcoming issue, but when the script arrives it's always full of new things that we never talked about — things that came to Mike as he spent more time with the story. This allows me to see it fresh again, and when I draw it I usually come up with an interpretation that Mike didn't expect. It's those moments that take the story down unexpected paths. I think that's the secret of a good collaboration — you have to create something greater than the parts.

This is starting to read disturbingly like a love letter, but it *is* a pretty intimate thing, the relationship between comics writer and artist, especially when it lasts beyond that magical 100-issue milestone.

This volume is a result of that sort of team-up. This is Mike and I (and all of our gifted cohorts) hitting our prime and firing on all cylinders. And whether you're reading it for the first time or the umpteenth time, you're in for a treat.

To finish, I'll share a little epiphany I had about the first story in this collection. Mike has often expressed that "Stitchglass Slide" is one of his favorite LUCIFER arcs, and Thole, the stitchglass weaver, is one of his favorite characters. Only as I was writing this introduction did I realize why: the gentle, humble Thole, a loyal weaver of stitchglass, is none other than Mike himself. He weaves love and trust and fear and every other emotion together to form his creations. And he makes those creations not only to express himself, but also to keep his family safe and secure. What could be more like the writer himself? So keep that in mind as you read. As for Thole's female counterpart, I can say with certainty that she doesn't seem at all like Mike's wife, Lin. But if Mike is the creature laboring away on his beloved art, then who could that demanding, bossy, and frightening female represent? Let's just hope it's editors in general, and not anyone specific.

Bringing this back around to the beginning, I've often thought that I owe my house to Neil Gaiman, but I owe everything in it to Mike Carey (and Shelly Bond, for realizing that the two of us would make a good team). I certainly didn't expect that I'd end up working with Mike for as long as I have. But with some luck, maybe we'll make another 100 issues of comics together, and when I write another intro for another one of our collections I'll get to thank Mike for a new house!

It's a funny thing making a living from stories, but I can't think of a better way to dedicate my time. And I'm grateful for every bit of it.

— Peter Gross
Minneapolis, 2014

GRIEF. GRIEF IS JAGGED EDGE GREEN *STIPPLE* SHOWING THROUGH BLEACHED WHITE. *ANGER* IS TURQUOISE SHOT WITH RED.
PAIN IS BURNED *BLACK*.
BURNED BLACK. THE *GODS* SHOUTING THUNDER THROUGH THE SKY.
OVER MY SMASHED HOUSE WHERE THE *BOY* LIE BLEEDING.
THE DANGER WAS *MINE*. THE DANGER WAS MINE THAT I BRINGED HIM INTO.
BUT I TRIED THEN TO *HELP* THE BOY. WITH MY OWN LIFE TRIED I TO *SAVE* THE BOY.
BURNED BLACK. FOR THE EMPTY *EGGS* WERE MY FUTURE AND HER FUTURE, TOO.
AND IN ALL THE WORLD NOW, NOTHING DOES BE TO *FILL* THEM.
LISTEN.
I WILL TELL YOU THE *COLORS* OF IT.

THE MALE BUILDS A HOUSE AND THE FEMALE COMES. WITH THE SPINNERS, ALWAYS IS THIS.
I FINDED LEVEL GROUND. GOOD GROUND. NO PLACE FOR EGG STEALERS TO HIDE.
AND I BUILDED THERE. OH YES.
SENDED OUT MY WEB ALL EVERYWHERE, TO TOUCH WHERE PEOPLE FEEL. TOUCH IT AND TAKE IT.
WEAVED THE FEELINGS INTO STITCHGLASS. JOY FOR THE EGG CHAMBER. HUNGER FOR THE FEEDING PIT.
LOVE, LOVE, LOVE FOR THE TOWER TIP TOP, FOR THE BAIT.
I AM THOLE, WHO SPINS IN EVERY COLOR!
I AM THOLE, KING OF STITCHGLASS, KING OF LOVE!
TWO RINGS I MAKED TO KEEP THE HOUSE SAFE. THE FIRST DID BE OF FORGETFULNESS, SO THE HOUSE WOULD SLIDE OUT OF THE MINDS OF EGG STEALERS.
BUT FOR THE INNER RING I NEEDED FEAR.

RABBITS FEAR FOXES. BIRDS FEAR CATS. MEN FEAR *EVERYTHING.*
WEB IS *FULL* OF FEAR, BUT I DID LOOK FURTHER, FURTHER.
THEN FINDED I THE *FOUNTAINHEAD.*
THEN FINDED I THE *MAKER.*

STITCHGLASS SLIDE I

The Weaving

MIKE CAREY-WRITER
PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY
ARTISTS
JARED FLETCHER-LETTERING
DANIEL VOZZO-COLORS AND SEPARATIONS
CHRISTOPHER MOELLER-COVER PAINTER
MARIAH HUEHNER-ASSISTANT EDITOR
SHELLY BOND-EDITOR
BASED ON CHARACTERS CREATED BY
GAIMAN, KIETH AND DRINGENBERG

THIS ISN'T VERY PRIVATE, LUCIFER.
PRIVACY IS FOR THOSE WHO'VE GOT SOMETHING TO HIDE.
I HAD MY DOUBTS, ELAINE BELLOC, BUT YOU SEEM TO HAVE ADAPTED FAIRLY WELL TO THIS ROLE.
THAT'S WHY I'VE COME TO YOU NOW-- INSTEAD OF JUST DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE.
THANKS, I GUESS.
BUT--
--DOING WHAT, EXACTLY?
WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?
IT'S ABOUT ADAPTING TO A NEW SITUATION.

YOU MEAN GOD GOING AWAY, OR THE *TITANS* STORMING HEAVEN?
YOU'VE BEEN KEEPING UP WITH CURRENT *EVENTS*. GOOD.
I MEAN *BOTH*.
I'M AWARE THAT THERE ARE *IMMORTALS*-- GODS, DEMONS AND THE LIKE-- LIVING HERE IN MY CREATION.
I TOLERATED THIS BECAUSE IT DIDN'T *MATTER* TO ME. NOW IT DOES. I WANT THEM GONE.
GONE *DEAD*, OR JUST GONE *GONE?*
IF I HANDLE IT *MYSELF*, I'LL DO WHATEVER'S QUICKEST.
BUT I'M PREPARED TO ENTERTAIN *ANOTHER* OPTION.
WOULD I HAVE TO DO IT *ALONE?*
I'LL ASSIGN YOU SOME *HELPERS* IF YOU LIKE. BE *CLEAR* ON THIS, THOUGH.
I'LL EXPECT YOU TO *FINISH* WHAT YOU START.
I'LL DO IT. JUST TO KEEP THE *BODY* COUNT DOWN.
BUT I'LL CHOOSE MY *OWN* HELPERS.

SO THE *FEAR* WAS GOOD, AND THE *LOVE* I HAD ALREADY IN PLENTY.
SO DAY BY DAY GROWED UP THE *HOUSE.*
TOUCH STITCHGLASS, AND THE FEELING DOES *BE* THERE.
THE FEELING THAT WAS FEELED BY THOSE YOU *TOOK* IT FROM. JUST AS STRONG. ALWAYS.
BUT SOME FEELINGS YOU DO *SWALLOW* AND THEN NOT WEAVE. TO KEEP INSIDE *HURTS.*
WHAT COMES NOT OUT AS STITCHGLASS COMES OUT AS *SLOP.*
I AM THOLE THE TIDY, THE CLEAN WORKER. MY SLOP I TAKED *FAR* AWAY FROM THE HOUSE.
TO THE *SLOPHOLE.*
ANOTHER GOOD THING I FINDED, FOR WHICH I CHOOSED THIS PLACE.
THE SLOPHOLE NEVER *FILLS,* AND NO SMELL OR OOZE DOES COME BACK THROUGH.

NO OFFENSE.
MARTIN?
NO HURT.
MARTIN, I CALLED YOU FIVE MINUTES--
OH JESUS! WHAT DID YOU DO NOW?
I WAS SCARED OF MY TEDDY AND SO I KILLED HIM WITH THE SCISSORS BUT THEN HE LOOKED SO FUNNY WITH HIS HEAD OFF I JUST LAUGHED AND LAUGHED AND LAUGHED!
MARTIN!
MARTIN, LISTEN TO ME!
I COULDN'T I COULDN'T I
COULDN'T STOP I COULDN'T--
I SAID NO SCISSORS! HOW MANY--?
HOW MANY FUCKING TIMES DID I SAY--?
JUST-- JUST STAY THERE.
I'M GOING TO SEND YOUR FATHER UP TO DEAL WITH YOU.

YOU SAID *WHAT?* ARE WE PLAYING *THAT* KIND OF GAME, NOW?
IF YOU WERE EVER HERE TO *DEAL* WITH ANY OF IT, STUART, YOU WOULDN'T CALL IT A GAME.
TRICIA, I'M NOT *HERE* BECAUSE I WORK A FIFTY-HOUR WEEK.
IT'S NOT AS THOUGH I--
DON'T YOU *DARE* THROW YOUR FUCKING JOB IN MY FACE!
I HAD A JOB ONCE, TOO. THAT DISASTER AREA UPSTAIRS WAS *YOUR* IDEA.
"IT'LL CHANGE OUR *LIVES,* SWEETHEART." WELL I DON'T SEE WHERE IT'S CHANGED YOURS!
JESUS, HOW CAN YOU EXPECT *MARTIN* TO BE EMOTIONALLY STABLE? LOOK AT THE *EXAMPLE* YOU SET HIM!
AT LEAST I'M HERE ENOUGH OF THE TIME TO *BE* AN EXAMPLE, YOU SELF-RIGHTEOUS *BASTARD.*
HE WAS SENT HOME FROM *SCHOOL* AGAIN. FOR HITTING THE TEACHER.
I THINK MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL IN THAT *ROUSSEAU* GUY. THE ONE YOUR COUSIN RAVED ABOUT.
OKAY.
BUT TONIGHT HE SLEEPS IN THE *ATTIC.*

NO! I DON'T WANT TO GO UP THERE!
IF YOU CAN'T CONTROL YOURSELF AROUND OTHER PEOPLE--
--YOU CAN'T BE AROUND OTHER PEOPLE.
RATCH
TCHIK
AHUH! AHUH! AHUH!
AAAAAAAAA!
BOLT
...

NOISE. WHERE FROM COMED THE NOISE? SHARP BROWN WITH MISERY, TOO JAGGED TO WEAVE.
THE WORLD INSIDE THE SLOPHOLE IS SMALL AND DARK.
THUD
WHUMP
CRUMP
AND ITS HILLS MOVE UNDER YOUR FEET.
YEAARRRGH!
AAH! AAH! AAH!
OW! OW! OW!
THE ANIMAL'S FEAR WAS TOO MUCH. IT DID MAKE ME BLIND AND DEAF AND HURTING LIKE DEATH.

IT WAS HARD TO WEAVE STRANDS THAT HAD NOT THAT *FEAR* IN THEM.
BUT I DID LET IT RUN OVER ME AND THROUGH ME, AND THROWED *OTHER* COLORS BACK.
PEACE. TRUST. CALM. SLEEP.
I SAW THEN I HAD MAKED A *BAD* THING HAPPEN. THIS ANIMAL DID *LIVE* INSIDE MY SLOPHOLE.
THIS ANIMAL DID *ABSORB* THE BAD-FEELING SLOP AND BE SICK.
SICK WITH BAD *FEELING.* WITH HATE-LOVE-HAPPY-ANGRY-SADNESS NOT HIS OWN.
NOBODY BUT I COULD FIX. I DID WEAVE A *SELF-STONE.*
I DID SMILE TO THINK OF AN ANIMAL WITH A SELF. BUT STILL--
--I LEFT IT *SLEEPING.* FEELING ONLY SELF-FEELINGS.
AT *PEACE.*
GET *UP,* MARTIN.
MNUH! DAD, I HAD THIS REALLY *WEIRD*--
COME DOWNSTAIRS. WE'RE *WAITING* FOR YOU.

SO *THIS* IS LITTLE MARKY.
MARTIN.
MARTIN. *COME* ON OVER HERE, SON.
MY NAME'S *ROUSSEAU.* YOUR FOLKS HAVE ASKED ME TO *HELP* YOU.
DON'T *NEED* NO HELP.
EVERYONE NEEDS HELP, SON. WE JUST DON'T ALL *KNOW* IT.
COME ON AND SIT *DOWN,* NOW.
I'M FINE! I FEEL FINE!
WE'RE GOING TO LET A LITTLE *LIGHT* INTO YOU, MARTIN. WE'RE GOING TO REALIGN YOUR *CHAKRAS.*
THIS ISN'T LIKE AN *EXORCISM,* IS IT, MISTER ROUSSEAU?
LORD NO, MRS. PATERSON. THIS IS SPIRITUAL *SCIENCE,* NOT SUPERSTITION.
THERE ARE NO *DEVILS* INSIDE MARTIN.
JUST THE FILAMENTS OF HIS OWN *SOUL,* CROSS-CONNECTED AND SHORTING OUT.
I'M THE *ELECTRICIAN* OF THE SPIRIT.

I'LL BEGIN WITH THE ***HEAD*** CHAKRA.
OW!
CHANT THE MANTRA I TAUGHT YOU, PLEASE-- OR ***INTONE*** IT INSIDE YOUR HEADS.
STOP IT! THAT ***HURTS!***
IT'S THE PAIN OF ***REALIGNMENT,*** MARTIN. OF EVERYTHING COMING RIGHT AGAIN INSIDE YOU.
IT'LL GET ***WORSE*** BEFORE IT GETS BETTER.
OOOLF!
MARTIN!
COME ***BACK*** HERE!
THERE'S NO WAY YOU'RE GETTING ***OUT*** OF THIS, YOUNG MAN!
THERE'S NOWHERE YOU CAN ***RUN!***

I FINISHED MY HOUSE.
MY HOUSE LIKE VOICES SINGING "COME, COME COME!"
BUT NO FEMALES DID LISTEN.
PERHAPS--
--I DID NEED MORE LOVE.
LOVE IS HARDEST TO WEAVE. MANY STRANDS. MANY COLORS ALL MIXED IN.
DEVOTION, TRUST, LUST, POSSESSIVENESS NEED TENDERNESS. SPINNER MUST FIND ALL.
I DID CAST HIGH AND FAR.
UNTIL MY WEB DID STRETCH BETWEEN A MILLION MINDS.
AND IN SOME OF THEM--
--I FINDED WHEREWITH TO WEAVE.

IF IT WERE *YOU* WHO WERE ASKING--
SHE IS CARRYING OUT MY *WISHES*, MAZIKEEN.
I WANT THE IMMORTALS *GONE* FROM HERE. THEY'RE INCONVENIENT.
STILL, IT GOES *HARD* WITH ME TO BE COMMANDED BY A CHILD.
AND TO SERVE WITH THE LIKES OF *THOSE*.
YOU THINK SHE'S TALKING ABOUT *US?*
MUST BE. HER *FACE* IS SCREWED UP IN DISGUST.
WELL, THE HALF I CAN *SEE* IS.
ELAINE BELLOC IS A CHILD NO LONGER. SHE HAS GROWN INTO SOMETHING *ELSE*.
I WANT YOU TO GIVE HER YOUR LOYALTY-- AND TO WATCH HOW SHE WORKS.
THEN I *OBEY*, MY LORD.
IN THIS, AS IN *ALL* THINGS.

EXCELLENT FEELINGS! FEMALES WOULD COME FROM EVERYWHERE.
FEMALES WOULD FIGHT EACH OTHER TO MATE WITH ME, FOR MY HOUSE WAS PERFECT, PERFECT--
!
!!!
!!!!!
THE ANIMAL. THE ANIMAL HAD COME OUT OF THE SLOPHOLE.
HOW HORRIBLE! HOW INOPPORTUNE!
YOU! YOU CANNOT STAY HERE, ANIMAL! THIS IS NOT YOUR HOUSE!
WHAT?
GO NOW. GO!
WHY MY CIRCLE DID NOT STOP YOU? MAKE YOU FORGET, OR BE AFRAID TO COME?
HEY! DON'T GO POKING AT ME!
I JUST WANTED TO SEE WHAT YOU WERE DOING.
THE SELF-STONE! IT PROTECTS FROM NOT-SELF FEELING!
YOU WALKED THROUGH MY RINGS AND FEELED NOTHING!

YOU HAVE TO GO *HOME*, ANIMAL. HOME TO YOUR SLOPHOLE.
I *WON'T*.
I *HATE* IT THERE.
I AM *DEMON*. I WILL EAT YOU AND KILL YOU AND *BITE* YOU MANY TIMES.
I DON'T *BELIEVE* YOU.
I'M *STAYING*.
IMPOSSIBLE! I WEAVED A *SPEAR* FROM MY OWN ANGER AND *SHARPENED* IT, GROWLING DEEP GROWLS.
THE ANIMAL FROM THE SLOPHOLE DID JUST *SIT*.
I BUILDED HIGH UP ON THE ROOF FOR MANY *HOURS*, PRETENDING I WAS *ALONE*.
THE ANIMAL FROM THE SLOPHOLE DID JUST *SIT*.
BUT AT *EVENING*, WHEN THE SUN BOWED TO THE MAKER--
--THE *ANIMAL* DID BOW ITS HEAD TOO. POURED OUT SADNESS, SADNESS, SADNESS.

ANIMAL, THIS IS NOT *GOOD.*
YOUR JAGGED BROWN *SORROW* WILL SCARE AWAY FEMALES.
'M NOT AN ANIMAL! I'M A *BOY.* MY NAME'S *MARTIN.*
I CAN'T *STOP* BEING SAD. OR ANGRY OR SCARED OR LAUGHING WHEN THERE'S NOTHING *FUNNY!*
THAT'S WHY MY MUM AND DAD SHOUT ALL THE TIME AND *HATE* ME!
MY DISMAY WAS *GREAT* THEN. GREAT MY *SHAME.*
THE ANIMAL-THAT-SAID-IT-WASN'T-AN-ANIMAL WAS *HURTING,* AND I HAD *MAKED* THE HURT.
I SENDED OUT MYSELF INTO THE *ANIMAL'S* SELF.
BEHIND JAGGED BROWN WERE *OTHER* COLORS.
PALE THEY WERE, AND BRITTLE-OLD.
FOR *MOST* SPINNERS, TOO WEAK TO WEAVE.
BUT I AM *THOLE!*
KING OF STITCHGLASS!

WHAT *IS* THAT THING?
IT IS A *SLIDE.* OF STITCHGLASS.
SLIDE ON IT, ANIMAL.
BUT IT'S *LAME.*
IT IS *NOT* LAME. I DID SPIN IT FROM EXCITEMENT AND JOY.
TRY. SEE.
THAT WAS INCREDIBLE!
NO MORE JAGGED BROWN.
THAT IS *GOOD.*

WHAT *TROUBLE* WAS IT? NOT MUCH.
TO WEAVE AN EXTRA *ROOM,* A LESS THAN ONE DAY'S WORK. TO FEED--
--BOY MARTIN COULD NOT EAT *GRASS.* SO I COLLECTED THE EARTH-FRUITS AND THE TREE-FRUITS.
NEVER HAD HE FEASTED SO WELL!
HIS *MIND,* TOO, I FEEDED. TAUGHT HIM THE COLORS OF STITCHGLASS AND THE WAY OF THE SPINNER.
HE DID BE *CLEVER* AND QUICK TO UNDERSTAND.
IN *MOST* AREAS.
YOU CAN'T LAY EGGS. THE *LADY* LAYS THE EGGS.
THE MALE DOES WEAVE THE SHELL, BOY MARTIN.
THE FEMALE *FILLS* THE SHELL WITH CHILD ESSENCE.
THEN THE *MALE*--
--THE *MALE* DOES--
PERHAPS I WILL EXPLAIN THIS THING TO YOU WHEN YOU ARE *OLDER.*

WHEN I BUILDED, HE DID *PLAY* ON THE SLIDE.
WHEN I RESTED, HE DID TELL ME THE *LEGENDS* OF THE BOY ANIMALS.
OF THOMAS TANKING-JOHN. OF SPIDER-BAT, AND INCREDIBLE HUCK.
HE SPEAKED NOT OF THE SLOPHOLE, AND I DID NOT *ASK* HIM.
WHEN HIS THOUGHTS TURNED *BROWN,* I LEAVED HIM TO SELF-FEELINGS.
SPINNERS GROW *QUICKLY.* THEY DO NOT *PLAY,* AS BOY ANIMALS DO.
THEY DO NOT *FEEL* WHAT BOY ANIMALS FEEL.

WHUMP
LOVER.
I'M YOURS.

PUPPE
ONE SHOWING
GUE
The
TWO THOUSAND

SO THE WORD STARTED TO GET *AROUND.* WHATEVER GAME THE DEVIL'S PLAYING, IT'S GOT A NEW SET OF *RULES.*
NO GODS. NO DEMONS. NO FAIRIES, IFRITS, ELEMENTALS, AB-DEAD, CHTHONIC POWERS OR LAUGHING GNOMES.
IF YOU'RE *IMMORTAL,* YOUR VISA EXPIRED, LIKE, YESTERDAY.
AND IF YOU *THINK* YOU MIGHT BE IMMORTAL, JUST ASK.
LUCIFER'S GOT A SUREFIRE WAY OF FINDING *OUT.*

The Winnowing

WIRE, BRIAR, LIMBER LOCK I

MIKE CAREY
WRITER
PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY
ARTISTS

JARED FLETCHER-LETTERING
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BASED ON CHARACTERS CREATED BY
GAIMAN, KIETH AND DRINGENBERG

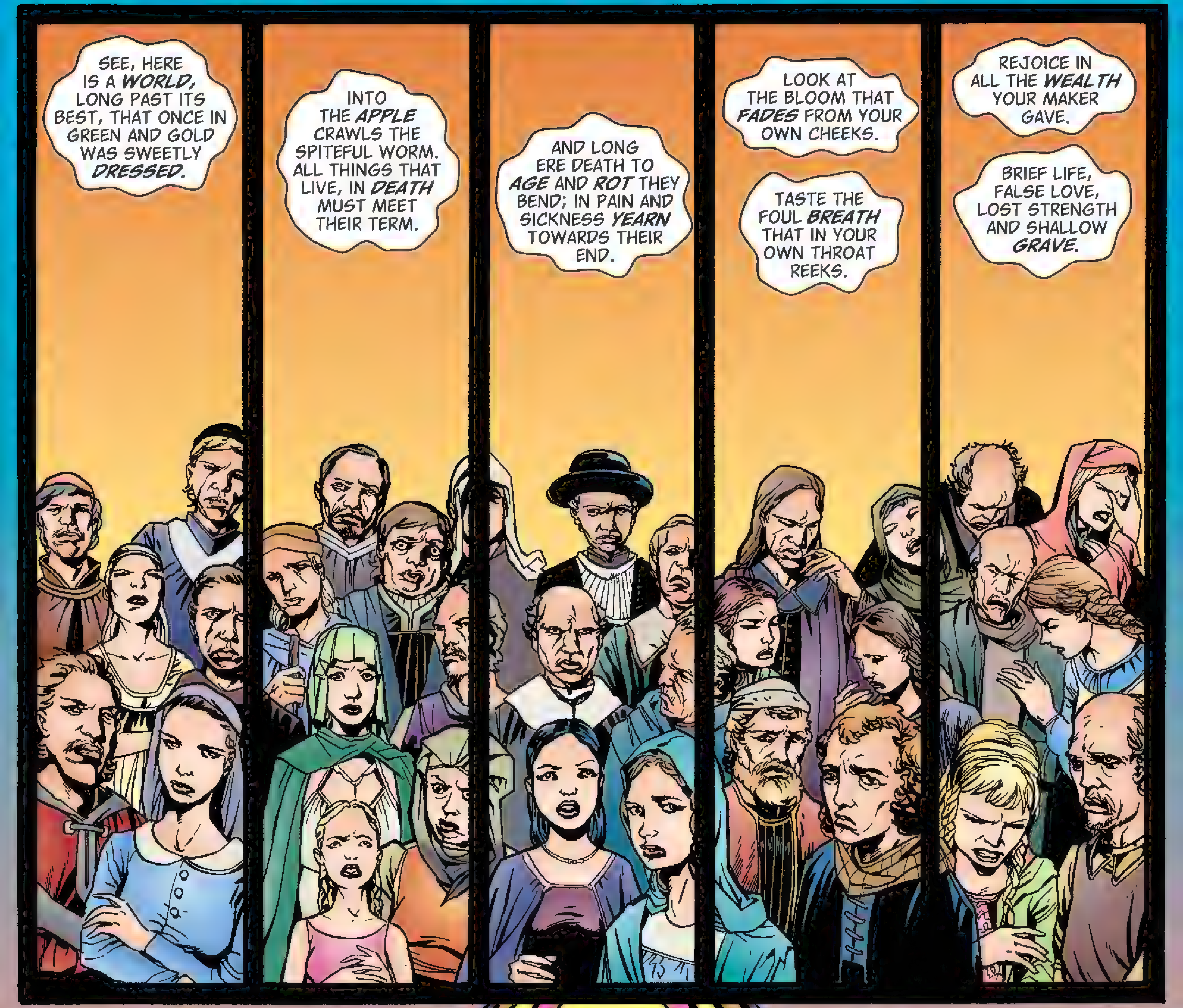
Y'KNOW, I THINK WE COULD JUST *SIT* THIS OUT.
NONE OF THESE GUYS IS GOING TO STICK AROUND FOR THE *PUNCH LINE*.
BROTHER, YOU'LL GO TO *ANY* LENGTHS TO DO NOTHING.
SPERA, MY *NOTHING* IS BETTER THAN YOUR SOMETHING.
WHEN ARCHANGELS COME TO *YOU* WITH THEIR PROBLEMS, *THEN* YOU CAN TALK.
AFTER THE BUSINESS WITH THE *TITANS,* GAUDIUM, LUCIFER DOESN'T WANT ANY MORE SURPRISES.
WE HAVE TO MAKE *SURE* THAT THEY LEAVE. EVERY LAST *ONE* OF THEM.
JUST THE SIX OF US, ELAINE? ISN'T THAT SORT OF A NEEDLE AND *HAYSTACK* SITUATION?
WE'LL BE IN TEAMS OF *TWO.*
AND WE'LL ALL HAVE SPECIFIC *AREAS* TO COVER.
LIKE THE *RHYME* YOU SING WHEN YOU'RE SKIPPING.
WIRE, BRIAR, LIMBER LOCK, THREE GEESE IN ONE FLOCK. ONE FLEW EAST, ONE FLEW WEST, ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST.

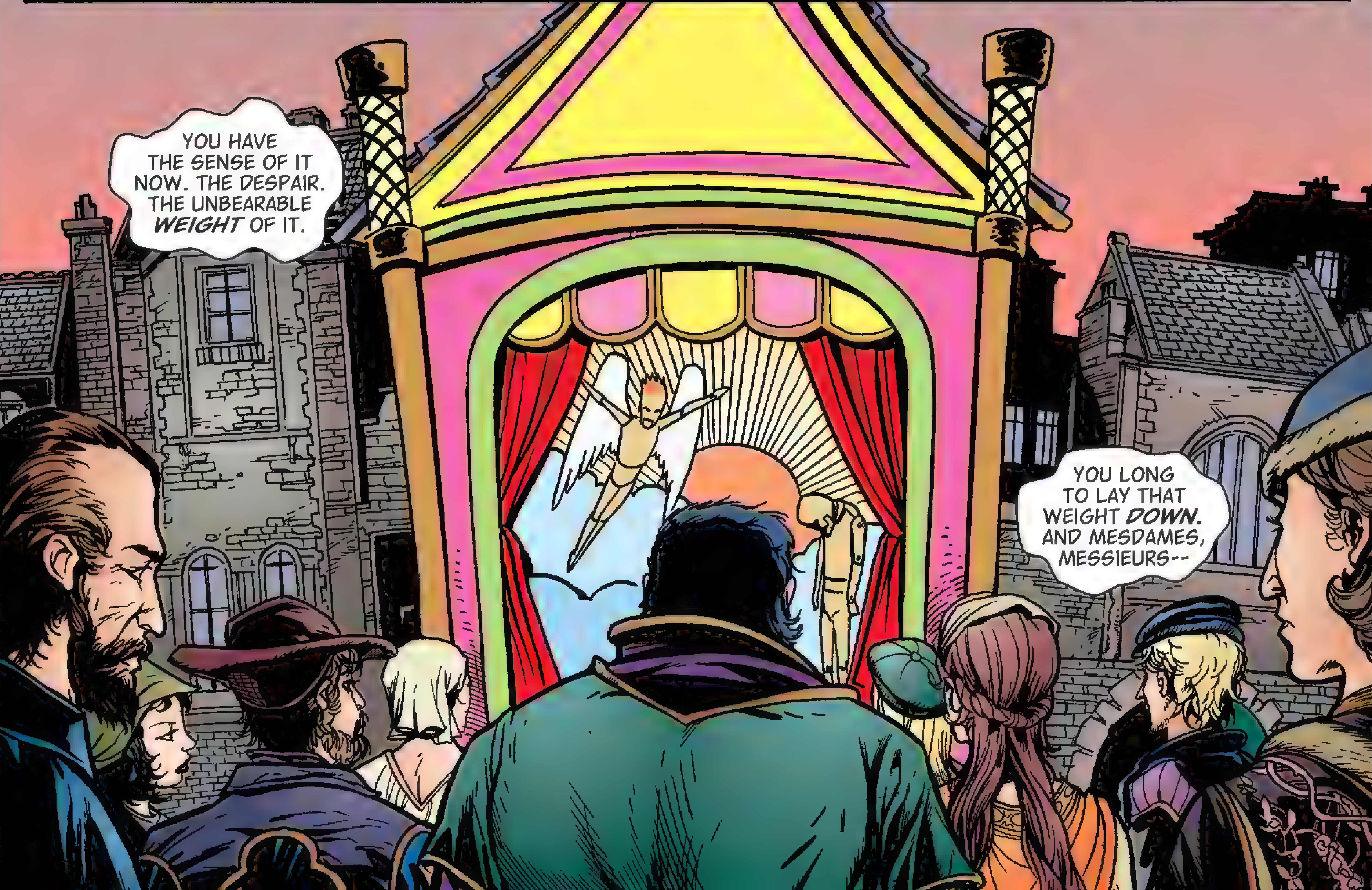
UHH... SURE, MONA. THANKS FOR SHARING.
SO THE *DOS AMIGOS* RIDE AGAIN, RIGHT?
I'M SORRY, GAUDIUM. NOT *THIS* TIME.
I THOUGHT I'D TRAVEL WITH *MAZIKEEN.* AT LEAST TO BEGIN WITH.
THAT'S *ABSURD.* TO ENCUMBER THE BEST WARRIOR HERE WITH THE CARE OF A *CHILD--*
SHE IS A CHILD NO *MORE,* ELOKIM SHAER.
AND YOU WILL BE *SILENT* UNTIL I CALL ON YOU TO SPEAK.
I UNDERSTAND. YOU WANT MY *STRENGTH,* BUT YOU DON'T TRUST MY TEMPER.
IF I DIDN'T *TRUST* YOU, I WOULDN'T HAVE ASKED FOR YOUR HELP.
BUT IT'S TRUE THAT I WANT TO DO THIS WITHOUT *HURTING* ANYONE.
GAUDIUM, I NEED YOU TO LOOK AFTER *MONA* FOR ME.
OW! STOP IT! MY FUCKING *SISTER'S* WATCHING.
MY IMAGE WON'T *STAND* THIS KIND OF TREATMENT!
GOOD LUCK, ALL OF YOU. AND BE *CAREFUL--* SINCE I'M BACK IN A REAL BODY I CAN'T WATCH OVER YOU.
BUT I'LL BE *THINKING* OF YOU. AND I'LL CHECK IN WHENEVER I CAN.

I CALLED IT ON THE *MONEY*-- BUT SO DID THE KID.
SHE'S *WAY* SHARP SINCE SHE DID THAT LAZARUS THING.
WITH *MOST* OF THESE SCHMUCKS WE'D JUST GO, "THE BIG GUY'S TAPPING HIS *FOOT* NOW."
AND THEY'D BE LIKE, "WE'RE *GONE.*"
BUT THERE WERE *HOLD-OUTS.*
THE DEAF. THE DESPERATE. THE DUMB.
FUCK THAT NOISE. GIVEN THE *ALTERNATIVE,* WE WERE DOING THEM A FAVOR.
AND WE WERE *READY* FOR ALL THAT SHIT.
WE WERE READY FOR *ANYTHING...*

One Flew East...

OKAY. MY *CHERUB*-SENSE IS TINGLING.
WHAT DOES *THAT* MEAN?
IT MEANS THERE ARE *DEMONS* IN THIS HORSE-DEFICIENT STINKPIT.
SHOULD WE SPLIT UP AND LOOK *AROUND?*
SURE. YOU CHECK THE *MIDDEN* HEAPS, I'LL DO THE BARS AND THE STRIP CLUBS.
MESDAMES-- MESSIEURS-- MY LORDS, LADIES, AND LUSCIOUS LITTLE ONES--
--A THOUSAND *THOUSAND* WELCOMES TO Teatro Crepuscolo!
SMALLER THAN A *SUITCASE!* BIGGER THAN THE *GRANDEST* OPERA!
Teatro Crepuscolo WILL DAZZLE YOUR EYES AND *CONFOUND* YOUR EXPECTATIONS!


SEE, HERE IS A *WORLD,* LONG PAST ITS BEST, THAT ONCE IN GREEN AND GOLD WAS SWEETLY *DRESSED.*
INTO THE *APPLE* CRAWLS THE SPITEFUL WORM. ALL THINGS THAT LIVE, IN *DEATH* MUST MEET THEIR TERM.
AND LONG ERE DEATH TO *AGE* AND *ROT* THEY BEND; IN PAIN AND SICKNESS *YEARN* TOWARDS THEIR END.
LOOK AT THE BLOOM THAT *FADES* FROM YOUR OWN CHEEKS.
TASTE THE FOUL *BREATH* THAT IN YOUR OWN THROAT REEKS.
REJOICE IN ALL THE *WEALTH* YOUR MAKER GAVE.
BRIEF LIFE, FALSE LOVE, LOST STRENGTH AND SHALLOW *GRAVE.*


YOU HAVE THE SENSE OF IT NOW. THE DESPAIR. THE UNBEARABLE *WEIGHT* OF IT.
YOU LONG TO LAY THAT WEIGHT *DOWN.* AND MESDAMES, MESSIEURS--

--Teatro Crepuscolo *NEVER* DISAPPOINTS!

!
THAT SOUNDED *NASTY.*
HISHHHH
EWWWWWWWWWW!

YOU!
ME?
YOU DID THIS! YOU KILLED ALL THESE PEOPLE!
I'M JUST A *PUPPET* THEATRE.
OH *SURE* YOU ARE.
POISON IN *JEST--* NO OFFENSE IN THE WORLD.
YOU'RE THE DEMON.
YOU'RE JUST *WEARING* THAT THING SO YOU CAN GET UP CLOSE TO PEOPLE AND EAT THEM.
PLEASE, PETITE MAM'SELLE, PETIT BIJOU!
DO NOT JUMP TO ANY HASTY *CONCLUSIONS.*
YOU MUST NOT VENTURE UPON A *CRITIQUE--*
--UNTIL YOU'VE *SEEN* THE SHOW.

THE TRAGICAL HISTORY OF MONA DOYLE--
A DRAMA IN *THREE* ACTS.
OH! OH! DADDY! DON'T TEAR MY MAGAZINE, PLEASE!
I'LL TEAR MORE THAN YOUR *MAGAZINE*, YOU SNIVELING LITTLE BITCH!
YOU'RE NOT MINE! EVERY TIME I LOOK AT YOU I SEE THAT IRISH SPUNKWAD LOOKING BACK AT ME!
HO HO HO! I WILL PUSH THIS LITTLE GIRL UNDER A CAR IN CASE SHE REVEALS HOW *EVIL* I AM.
NOBODY WILL *MISS* HER.
OH LOOK! A DISCARDED *SOUL* THAT NO ONE WANTS.
I'LL USE IT AS *BAIT* FOR ELAINE BELLOC. CERTAINLY IT HAS NO *OTHER* DISCERNIBLE FUNCTION.
THREE ACTS--
--AND AN *EPILOGUE*.

YOU NEVER CHANGE, ABRAZUL.
EVEN THE CHEESY PICKUP LINES ARE THE SAME.
NEWSFLASH, SNAKEFACE. THE KID'S WITH ME.
GRAWWWWWWW!
KNOW YOUR PLACE, GAUDIUM! I'LL LEAVE YOU HER BONES TO CHEW ON!
"NEWSFLASH"? YOUR CULTURAL REFERENTS DIFFER FROM MY OWN.
AS DO YOUR CONCLUSIONS.
UFF! YOU'RE BACKING ME UP AGAINST THE WALL HERE, AB.
AND DO YOU BITE WHEN YOU'RE CORNERED, LITTLE RAT?
NOPE-- NOT EXACTLY--
I RADIATE JOY AND LOVE AND PEACE.
LIKE IT SAYS ON THE FUCKING LABEL.
AAAAAAARGHHH!

SQUITSCH
WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU *LOOKING* AT?
GAUDIUM! YOU WENT BACK TO YOUR *OLD* SHAPE.
THE ONE YOU HAD IN HEAVEN BEFORE--
GOD IS *DEAD,* RIGHT? OR AT LEAST M.I.A.
THE WAY I SEE IT, WE'RE OFF THE *HOOK.* WE CAN BE WHATEVER THE HELL WE *WANT* TO BE.
HISSHH
HISSHH
HISSHH
OF COURSE, WHEN EVERYONE *ELSE* STARTS REALIZING THAT--
--SO MUCH SHIT IS GONNA HIT, IT'LL HAVE TO BE CONTINUED ON THE NEXT *FAN.*
I DO WHAT'S GOT TO BE DONE, Y'KNOW? IT'S NOT *CLEAN.* IT'S NOT *NICE*--
--IT'S JUST MY *JOB.*

One Flew West...
WE SHOULD HAVE TAKEN *ANOTHER* PATH. AN AMBUSH WOULD BE TOO *EASY* HERE.
AN *AMBUSH?*
THIS PLACE IS LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A *FAIRY* TALE.
CASE IN POINT--

THE WALLS *CRUMBLE* AT THE SLIGHTEST TOUCH.
WHO WOULD *LIVE* IN SUCH A MONSTROSITY?
IN A HOUSE MADE OF *GINGERBREAD?* I COULD HAZARD A--
STOP!
ELOKIM SHAER, DON'T *EAT* THAT!
KRAKOOOM

WHO'S THAT NIBBLING AT MY *WALLS?*
TWO CHERRY-CHEEKED LITTLE *CHILDREN,* IS IT, COME TO VISIT GRANDMA?
ARE YOU *BLIND,* OLD WOMAN?
WE'RE NOT *CHILDREN.* WE'RE NOT EVEN OF YOUR--
NOW, NOW, NOW, LITTLE BOY. GRANDMA IS *OLD* AND BENT--
--BUT SHE KNOWS A HAWK FROM A *HANDSAW.*
TWO DARLING LITTLE MORSELS. SO INNOCENT.
SO TENDER.

ARE YOU *AWAKE,* MY POPPETS?
SUCH *SLEEPY-HEADS* YOU ARE, AND THE SUN STILL HIGH IN THE SKY.
WELL, GRANDMA'S GOT A *TREAT* FOR HER LITTLE DOLLY DAYDREAMS.
BROTH.
BROTH WITH *NECK* BONES.
THE BARS-- I CAN'T *BREAK* THEM.
THE HAG HAS WOVEN *SPELLS* INTO THE WOOD.
USE THE *LATCH,* SPERA!
NO, POPPET, NO.
AAAAA!
WE'LL BANK UP THE *FIRE,* FIRST.
THEN WE'LL KILL THE CHICKEN.

THERE, DOLLYKINS. PUSH THE STICKS TO THE *BACK* OF THE FIRE.
YOU'LL HAVE TO LEAN FORWARD ON *TIPPY-TOES,* BUT GRANDMA WILL *HOLD* YOU.
I'M SORRY, GRANDMA--
--BUT THIS *BULLSHIT* HAS GONE ON LONG ENOUGH.
WHAT?
YOU'LL DO AS YOU'RE *TOLD,* MY FINE LITTLE MADAM.
OR ELSE YOU'LL FEEL HOW *HEAVY* GRANDMA'S HAND CAN BE.
YOU GOT THE *COTTAGE* RIGHT, BUT THIS IS SOME KIND OF *HALLOWEEN* OUTFIT.
AND GRETEL TRICKED THE *WITCH* INTO THE OVEN, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE YOU *HEARD* THIS STORY, HASN'T IT?

URRRRRRR!
THAT'S THE WAY *I* REMEMBER THE STORY TOO.
NO, IT WAS ***KLUGE HANS!***
SHE ***CAN'T*** PUT US IN THE FIRE! I WON'T GO!
THERE ARE A ***THOUSAND*** SOULS INSIDE HER. I SEE THEM NOW.
STRIKE, WHILE THEY'RE AT ***ODDS*** WITH EACH OTHER!
GRANDMA-- I KNOW WHO YOU ***ARE.***
YOU DON'T YOU DON'T YOU DON'T!
I'M THE WICKED ***WITCH*** AND I'LL KILL YOU!

UHHH! GRANDMA, SHOULDN'T--
--SHOULDN'T THE CHILDREN LIVE--
--HAPPILY EVER AFTER?
YOU DON'T-- HAVE TO STAY HERE.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SCARED ANY-MORE.

THE CHILDREN FROM THE *WELL*--?
YEAH. HUNDREDS OF MISERABLE LITTLE *GHOSTS*, CLINGING TOGETHER.
DISGUISED AS THE SCARIEST THING THEY COULD *THINK* OF.
WHY DID THEY *NEED* A DISGUISE?
WELL, SOMETHING KILLED THEM AND MADE THEM INTO A *WATER* FEATURE.
MAYBE *THAT* HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT.
THEY WANTED TO MAKE ALL THE BAD THINGS KEEP THEIR *DISTANCE*. AND LET'S FACE IT--
WHAM
--IT'S NOT LIKE THEY HAD A *CHOICE* OF SCENIC DESTINATIONS.
YOU SEEM *ANGRY*.
OF COURSE I'M ANGRY. SLOPPY WORK ALWAYS MAKES ME ANGRY.
WHO BUILDS A CREATION AND THEN LEAVES OUT THE *AFTERLIFE?*
LIKE *FATHER*, LIKE *SON*.
WITCH'S COTTAGE
IT'S ALWAYS SOMEONE *ELSE* WHO HAS TO TAKE UP THE FUCKING *SLACK*.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest...

WHERE NEXT?
GIVE ME A *MINUTE* OR TWO, MAZIKEEN. PLEASE.
AS FAR AS THE MOUNTAINS THERE'S NOTHING. NOTHING *LIVES* HERE.
THEN WE SHOULD MOVE *ON.*
WE WILL. I'M JUST A BIT *TIRED.*
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I *HAD* A BODY. I'M STILL NOT QUITE--

SLEEP, ELAINE BELLOC.
WE *MISSED* ONE.
I'LL DEAL WITH IT.

THE WORLD WAS LOOKING STRANGE.
NOT JUST UPSIDE DOWN, BUT DIM, AND A BIT RED AROUND THE EDGES.
AND IT SMELLED REAL BAD.
LIKE CARPETS.
I HEARD YOUR **CALL**, SEX-BLOSSOM.
HERE I **AM**.
CARPETS THAT HAD GOT WET AND THEN GOT DRY AGAIN.
YOU **COMED!** YOU COMED AT LAST TO ME!
MOST BEAUTEOUS! MOST FECUND! SCARCELY CAN I CONTAIN MY **JOY!**
KISS MY **KNUCKLES.** I LIKE THAT.
BUT THE BOY MARTIN. I WOULD ASK YOU PLEASE TO **RELEASE** HIM.
HE IS MY **FRIEND.**
FRIEND?
HNN.

WELL LET'S SEE THIS *HOUSE* OF YOURS. IF I *LIKE* IT, YOU CAN FEED ME.
THEN YOU CAN *FUCK* ME.
HEY, YOU MADE MY *NOSE* BLEED. YOU SHOULDN'T'VE--
KERRUNCH
...

The War

STITCHGLASS SLIDE II

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BASED ON CHARACTERS CREATED BY
GAIMAN, KIETH AND DRINGENBERG

HERE DOES BE THE *EGG* CHAMBER. I WEAVED IT FROM--
MAYBE YOU DIDN'T *HEAR* ME, SUGAR LUMP.
I SAID I'M *HUNGRY.*
UUNA WILL WAIT IN THE FOODPIT.
SHE LIKES SWEET POTATOES, NUTMEG, SPEARGRASS, WILD THYME AND CACTUS ROOTS. AND TO HAVE HER *ARMPITS* LICKED WHILE SHE EATS.
POOR THOLE! THIS WAS WHAT HE'D BEEN BUILDING *UP* TO ALL THIS TIME.
WITH UUNA AND HIS HORMONES ALL GANGING UP ON HIM, HE DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE.
BUT ALL *I* COULD SEE WAS THAT HE WAS IGNORING ME.
SHE SMASHED MY *SLIDE,* AND HE WAS RUNNING AFTER HER!
WELL HE'D BE *SORRY.*
THEY'D *BOTH* BE SORRY.
BUT WHEN THEY *SAID* THEY WERE SORRY I'D TELL THEM IT WAS TOO *LATE.*

SOMETHING WAS *DIGGING* INTO MY LEG. SOMETHING IN MY POCKET.
A MARBLE?
A JAWBREAKER?
THE *SELF-STONE.*
THOLE'S FIRST *GIFT* TO ME.
WELL, I DIDN'T WANT *ANYTHING* OFF OF HIM!
I UPPED AND I *THREW* IT, AS FAR AWAY AS I COULD, AND I--
STOPPED
BEING
ME
IMAGINE A *SYMPHONY* THAT'S ALL CRESCENDO.
IMAGINE A TIDE THAT NEVER GOES *OUT.*

THOLE HAD WOVEN HIS HOUSE OUT OF MILLIONS OF *STRANDS* OF EMOTION-- THIN, BUT STRONG, LIKE *WIRE*.
ONCE I LET GO OF THE SELF-STONE, EVERY ONE OF THOSE WIRES WAS PUMPING ITS *CURRENT* DIRECTLY INTO ME.
THE HUNGER OF THE *PREDATOR*. THE FEAR OF THE *PREY*.
THE ANGER, LOVE, PAIN AND JOY OF *COUNTLESS* MINDS, ALL SPUN TOGETHER LIKE FLAX.
AND LIKE BASS NOTES PLUCKED FROM MY OWN INTESTINES, THE *SORROW* OF THE IMMORTALS--
--DRIVEN *FORTH* FROM THIS REALM BY LUCIFER'S EDICT, *HARRIED* BY HIS SERVANTS--
FRIEND MARTIN, YOU MUST *HELP* ME TO HUNT FOR WILD STRAWBERRIES AND BLOODWEED.
UUNA IS STILL *HUNGRY!*

THAT FIRST DAY WAS BAD. BUT IT GOT *WORSE.*
UUNA RULED NOW. AND THOLE *DOTED* ON HER LIKE A LOVESICK PUPPY.
AFTER A COUPLE OF BAD *EXPERIENCES* WITH HER HEAVY HANDS AND SHORT TEMPER, I KEPT OUT OF HER WAY.
EVERY TIME SHE *SMELLED* ME, SHE GROWLED LIKE SHE HAD A TOOTHACHE OR SOMETHING.
I KNEW JUST ENOUGH ABOUT *SEX* TO KNOW THAT WHEN THEY'D DONE IT THE EGGS WOULD BE FULL OF SOMETHING.
I *CHECKED* THEM EVERY DAY. THEY STAYED *EMPTY.*
BUT THEN UUNA STARTED PUTTING ON *WEIGHT--* WHICH WAS PRETTY SCARY TO SEE.
SHE STOPPED MOVING AROUND. JUST STAYED IN THE *FOODPIT* ALL THE TIME AND ATE. AND THEN ONE DAY--
--SHE CAUGHT MY *SCENT* ON HER LOLLING TONGUE, AND SMILED.
MARTINNN...
OR AT ANY RATE, SHE SHOWED HER *TEETH.*

I THINK I'LL BE SQUIRTING SOME *YOLKS* INTO THOSE EGGS OF YOURS PRETTY SOON.
MOST BLISSFUL OF ALL DAYS! MOST *WELCOME* OF ANY NEWS!
SO I'M STARTING TO HANKER. YOU *KNOW* ABOUT HANKERING?
I HAVE HEARD OF IT. SHALL I MASSAGE YOUR *SCALP* SOME MORE?
NO, MY LITTLE *FUCK-FLOWER.*
JUST BRING ME THE *BOY.*

I REALLY, REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO DO THIS.
THERE'D BE SO MANY QUESTIONS. SO MANY EXPLANATIONS TO GET THROUGH...
AND SOMEWHERE IN THE CLUTTER AT THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART WAS ANOTHER FEAR.
THAT ONCE THEY'D GOT ME BACK, MY MOM AND DAD WOULD NEVER LET ME GO AGAIN.
...
I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND BACK THEN ABOUT THE GATES.
NOW YOU QUIT FOOLING AROUND, MARTIN, AND GET BACK DOWNSTAIRS.
HOW A WHOLE RIVER OF TIME COULD ROLL BY ON ONE SIDE OF THEM--
--AND ON THE OTHER SIDE, JUST A TRICKLE.
LIKE COLD SWEAT.
OR A TEAR.

THOLE!
I'VE GOT SOME FOOD STUCK BETWEEN MY TEETH.
I WILL SCRAPE IT AWAY MOMENTLY.
WITH A TWIG OF FRAGRANT EUCALYPTUS.
YOU MISS THE BOY ANIMAL?
IT GRIEVES ME THAT HE GOED AWAY SO SUDDENLY.
BUT IF HE HAD STAYED, YOU WOULD HAVE DEVOURED HIM-- AND THAT WOULD HAVE HURTED ME MORE.
HNNNN.

I MISS HIM, *TOO.*
HAVE THAT EUCALYPTUS TWIG *READY* FOR WHEN I GET BACK.
NO NO NO NO NO!
THIS THING MUST NOT *BE!* YOU CANNOT *GO* THERE!
I GO WHERE I *LIKE.*
YOU KNOW, SPUNK-MUFFIN, I'VE CHANGED MY *MIND.*
NNNNGGG!
BOIL SOME *WATER,* AND TIDY UP THAT FOODPIT.
WE'RE GOING TO EAT THE LITTLE BASTARD *TOGETHER.*

I FOUND HIM *HIDING* IN THE ATTIC. SORRY ABOUT THE INCONVENIENCE, MR. ROUSSEAU.
THERE'S NO *INCONVENIENCE.*
MARTIN, WHAT DID YOU DO TO YOUR *CLOTHES?*
I GUESS I *SCARED* YOU, DIDN'T I, MARTIN?
NO!
YOU HURT MY *HEAD!*
I *KNOW* I DID. AND BELIEVE ME, I'M *SORRY* IT HAS TO HURT.
BUT IT'S LIKE-- DAYLIGHT HURTS YOUR *EYES* WHEN YOU'VE BEEN LIVING IN THE DARK. YOU SEE?
AGILE
WHAT WAS THAT?
BOXES. HE HAD THEM ALL STACKED *UP.*
I GUESS THEY *OVERBALANCED.*
ANYWAY, YOU COME ON *OVER* HERE.
AND WE'LL JUST TAKE *UP* WHERE WE LEFT OFF.

NOW, ARE YOU GOING TO *WORK* WITH ME THIS TIME?
BECAUSE IT'LL HURT *LESS* IF YOU DO.
NO!
THERE'S A *PEACE* GREATER THAN ANYTHING YOU'VE EVER KNOWN, SWIRLING *AROUND* YOU, TRYING TO GET IN.
I'M GOING TO CALL IT DOWN *INTO* YOU, MARTIN. I'M GOING TO--
KER-R-RACKKK
YOU KNOW, IN *MY* CONDITION--
--YOU SHOULDN'T BE MAKING ME *DO* THINGS LIKE THIS.

AND ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE GATE, THE RIVER RAN *ON.*
THOLE *WAITED,* TENSE AND TERRIFIED AND IRRESOLUTE.
THE LONG DAY WANED. THE SLOW MOON CLIMBED. HE *FOUGHT* AGAINST HIMSELF.
AGAINST HIS *LOVE,* WHICH HAD BEEN THE POINT OF HIS EXISTENCE.
THE NEXT MORNING, HE BEGAN TO *BUILD.*
GLISSADES OF WEAKNESS. TERRACES OF GUILT AND SHAME.
AMBUSCADES.
STITCHGLASS *WAR.*

HNN. YOU'VE BEEN *BUSY.*
WELL *DONE,* LOVER. THIS IS ALMOST CLEVER.
THOOOOOM
BUT I SAW IT *COMING.*
YOU CAN'T MESS WITH MY *FEELINGS--*
--UNLESS THIS STUFF ACTUALLY *TOUCHES* ME.

I THINK THAT *SLIDE* MIGHT MAKE A DECENT OUTDOOR BARBECUE. GO GET SOME KINDLING.
OTHERWISE I'M GOING TO BE SAMPLING THE JOYS OF SINGLE *MOTHERHOOD.*
NO
NO
NO
NO
NO
NO
HE SAW THEN WHAT HE HAD TO *DO.* IT MADE HIM HEARTSICK.
IT MADE HIM WANT TO BE *DEAD.*
EXTRUDED STITCHGLASS IS POISON. TO *REABSORB* IT MAKES A SPINNER VERY SICK.
BUT THERE IS A *SOLVENT*-- A KIND OF ANTI-STITCHGLASS THAT HE CAN SECRETE FROM A *GLAND* IN HIS MOUTH.
JUST THE *OUTER* CIRCLE.
THE ONE WOVEN OUT OF *FORGETFULNESS.*

SLEEP, ELAINE BELLOC.
HE WAS SENDING UP A SIGNAL FLARE.
I DON'T KNOW WHO HE THOUGHT WOULD ANSWER IT.
BUT AS IT TURNED OUT, THERE WAS ONE IN THE WASTELAND WHO WATCHED--
--AND WAS MINDFUL OF US.
WE *MISSED* ONE.
I'LL DEAL WITH IT.

YOU. SPINNER.
ALL IMMORTALS WERE TOLD TO *LEAVE* THIS REALM. WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE?
I'M TRYING TO *EAT.*
AND ONLY OUR MENFOLK *SPIN* STITCH-GLASS.
THAT DOESN'T *CONCERN* ME.
AS I SAID--
WE FEMALES PREFER TO *SQUIRT.* THAT'S CONFUSION, BY THE WAY.
WITH A LITTLE *FEAR.*

CHOKE ON IT, YOU LILIM BITCH!
THINK YOU'RE TOO GOOD FOR THE REST OF US.
WHEN ALL YOU REALLY ARE--
--IS WEAK
SUFFERING
FLESH!

YOU BROKE THE *EGGS!*
I WAS NEVER THE MOTHERLY *TYPE,* BUT I'M STILL GOING TO RIP YOUR--
GUUUUUUH!

AND *YOU?* YOU CAN LEAVE OR YOU CAN DIE.
DECIDE NOW. I'VE WASTED *ENOUGH* TIME ALREADY.
I-- I--
MAZIKEEN.
YOU SHOULD HAVE *WOKEN* ME.

WHY? I WAS CARRYING OUT MY ORDERS.
LET HIM CHOOSE, AND THEN WE'RE DONE HERE.
CHOOSE WHAT?
DEATH, OR EXILE.
AS MY LORD LUCIFER HAS DECREED.
WELL LET'S SEE...
WHAT HE ACTUALLY SAID WAS THAT ALL THE IMMORTALS HAD TO LEAVE.
THOLE?
THAT IS YOUR NAME, RIGHT?
HOW SOLD ARE YOU ON IMMORTALITY?
I MEAN, AS A CONCEPT?

IT WAS ELAINE. ONE OF THE HOLY SISTERS.
WHO HER COMPANION WAS, I NEVER FOUND OUT. AND THE MEMORY OF WHAT SHE DID TO THOLE REMAINS SHADOWY AND INCOMPLETE WITHIN MY MIND.
BUT AFTERWARDS THEY LEFT WITHOUT A WORD.
LEFT US TO MOURN, AND TRY TO UNDERSTAND.
I LIVED IN THAT PLACE FOR FOURTEEN YEARS.
IT BECAME MY HOME, AND THOLE BECAME MY FATHER-- EACH MORE PRECIOUS TO THE OTHER BECAUSE OF WHAT WE'D LOST.
I CANNOT SAY MY HEART BROKE WHEN HE DIED. I HAD WATCHED HIM GROW OLD, AND I AM A REALIST ABOUT SUCH THINGS.
AS A REALIST I SAT AND PONDERED ON WHAT HE HAD GIVEN UP TO STAY WITH ME.
TO GIVE ME A HOME.
THE GRIEF ITSELF I BALANCE WITHIN ME. AS HE WOULD HAVE DONE.
UNTIL I CAN WEAVE IT INTO SOMETHING ELSE.

SHE DOES NOT *SPEAK* AS WE COME AWAY.
SHE IS *ANGRY.*
IT SHOWS IN HER *FACE,* FIRST--
--THEN IN HER *BODY*--
--AND FINALLY IN HER *WORLD.*

The Widow

WIRE, BRIAR, LIMBER LOCK II

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BASED ON CHARACTERS CREATED BY
GAIMAN, KIETH AND DRINGENBERG

MAZIKEEN, DON'T DO THAT AGAIN. FIGHT AND *KILL* WITHOUT--
--WITHOUT EVEN *TELLING* ME FIRST.
VERY WELL. I WILL NOT.
BUT I THINK THERE MAY BE *OTHER* THINGS THAT HAVE PROVOKED THIS ANGER, ELAINE BELLOC.
AND IF YOU DON'T *CONTROL* IT, THE LAND WILL SUFFER.
YOU'RE *RIGHT.* AND I'M SORRY.
FOR WHAT? MY LORD LUCIFER HAS COMMANDED ME TO *OBEY* YOU.
IF I ERR, I MUST BE *TOLD.*
AS THE GROUND BEGINS TO *RISE* AGAIN, WE LEAVE THE BOY AND THE STITCHGLASS SPINNER BEHIND US.
THEY ARE BOTH MORTAL NOW. AND WE WERE TOLD TO WEED OUT THOSE WHO DO NOT DIE.

THEY WERE THE BOY'S PARENTS.
SHE SAYS AT LAST.
THE BODIES. WE LEFT HIM DIGGING A *GRAVE* FOR HIS MUM AND DAD.
AND IT WAS *THAT* WHICH MOVED YOU?
THE OTHER WAY *AROUND* IS USUALLY CONSIDERED MORE TRAGIC.
I SUPPOSE.
IT JUST REMINDED ME OF-- STUFF THAT I'D *FORGOTTEN.*
STUFF THAT I'D *LET* MYSELF FORGET.
YOUR *OWN* DEATH.
NO, THAT SORT OF *STAYS* WITH YOU. I WAS THINKING ABOUT MATT AND BARBARA. AND DAVID EASTERMAN.
ALL THE PEOPLE WHO THOUGHT THEY WERE *MY* PARENTS.

I WISH I'D KNOWN MORE BACK THEN ABOUT WHAT I WAS.
ENOUGH TO *PROTECT* THEM, MAYBE.
PROTECT THEM FROM *WHAT?*
WELL... FROM *LIFE.* FROM ALL THE STUFF THAT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO PROTECT *ME* FROM.
IT'S HARD TO *EXPLAIN.* DID YOU HAVE A YOUNGER BROTHER OR SISTER? SOMEONE YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO LOOK OUT FOR?
I HAD MANY THOUSANDS OF EACH. IT'S WHY I VALUE MY *PRIVACY.*
OKAY. THEN HOW ABOUT LUCIFER?
THE WAY YOU WATCH *HIS* BACK. ISN'T THAT KIND OF LIKE--?
THWIIIP
FOR ALL HER *POWER,* SHE DIDN'T SENSE THAT WE WERE OBSERVED.
DID I JUST *MISS* SOMETHING?
YES.
THAT SOMETHING WAS MOVING, IN THE DARK BEYOND THE CAMPFIRE.
SOMETHING THAT COULD OUTRUN MY DAGGER. WELL, NO MATTER.
TO BE AWARE OF A THREAT IS TO REPLY TO IT. FOR ME--
--AS FOR MY MASTER.

LOS ANGELES.
THE HOUSE OF LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR.
I SEE YOU'VE COME *ARMED.*
I *SHOULD* HAVE SPECIFIED SEMI-FORMAL.
THE HOST ARE MINDFUL OF THE *HELP* YOU LATELY OFFERED US, LUCIFER.
BUT STILL YOU ARE THE ADVERSARY.
AND IF I TURN NASTY YOU WANT TO DIE WITH YOUR *BOOTS* ON. I SEE.
DID YOU CALL US HERE TO *INSULT* US?
NO, URIEL-- TO *WARN* YOU. I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD HAVE TIME TO *PREPARE.*
PREPARE FOR *WHAT?*
FOR THE END OF THE *WORLD.*
COME AND *SEE.*

WELL, WE'RE *FINISHED* HERE. THE LAST IMMORTALS ARE GONE.
I'VE CAST MY MIND OUT CLEAR ACROSS THOSE MOUNTAINS AND THERE'S NOTHING THERE.
GOOD. THIS WORK HAS SEEMED *INTERMINABLE.*
YOU'VE GOT SOMEWHERE ELSE YOU NEED TO *BE,* MAZIKEEN? YOU SHOULD HAVE SAID.
HERE. LET'S SEE WHAT I CAN WHIP UP FOR YOU.

YOU SEE THE *CLEARING?*
OF COURSE.
SET DOWN THERE. THE OTHERS ARE *WAITING* FOR US.

MONA! YOU'RE OKAY! I WAS *WORRIED* ABOUT YOU.
I'M FINE. I HAD *GAUDIUM* TO LOOK AFTER ME.
FEH.
HERE'S THE FINAL *SCORE.* TWELVE THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED AND TWENTY-TWO EVICTIONS, SEVENTY-FOUR *FATALITIES.*
THANKS, SPERA. I'LL LOOK AT IT *LATER.*
SO THE GOOD GUYS WON. ARE WE *HOT,* OR ARE WE NOT?
ALL ASSES *KICKED--* NO JOB TOO BIG OR TOO SMALL!
UMM... ACTUALLY IT OUGHT TO BE *YOU* DEALING OUT THE STROKES.
I KNOW.
FEEL FREE TO BUTT IN WITH THE OCCASIONAL *ADJECTIVE.*
I'M SORRY, GAUDIUM.
I JUST CAN'T FEEL VERY *PROUD* OF WHAT WE'VE DONE.
THAT CAME OUT WRONG. I'M *GRATEFUL* TO ALL OF YOU.
AND THE WAY YOU *WORKED* TOGETHER, AS A TEAM, WAS AMAZING.
I THINK WE ALL KNOW EACH OTHER-- *TRUST* EACH OTHER-- A LOT BETTER NOW.

BUT?
BUT MOST OF THE IMMORTALS WERE JUST MINDING THEIR OWN *BUSINESS.*
AND WE HOUNDED THEM AND CHASED THEM AWAY AND IF THEY DIDN'T GO WE *KILLED* THEM.
WE ONLY KILLED THE ONES WHO WERE TRYING TO KILL *US,* ELAINE.
WE DID WHAT WE *UNDERTOOK* TO DO.
TO A SOLDIER, THAT IN *ITSELF* IS VIRTUE.
AND YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF *THIS.* WOULD THOSE WHO DIED BE ALIVE NOW, IF MY LORD *LUCIFER* HAD VISITED THEM INSTEAD?
OR WOULD SOME OF THE *LIVING* NOW BE--
WHAT'S THE *MATTER?*
THE *TREES--*
THE TREES ARE TOO *CLOSE.*

TOO *CLOSE?*
WHAT, YOU WANT WE SHOULD MOVE THE FOREST *BACK* A WAYS?
WAIT. I THINK--
I THINK I MADE A *MISTAKE.*
OR ELSE SOMEONE WAS HIDING FROM--
UUUF!

HOLY MOTHER OF *FUCK!*
ELAINE!
SPREAD *OUT.* WE NEED TO--
THWIKKK
WHAT ARE YOU *SMILING* ABOUT?
I *DIDN'T* MISS LAST NIGHT.
MY *PRIDE* IS SALVAGED.

I THOUGHT YOU HAD DIVIDED YOUR GATEWAY INTO *PIECES,* MORNINGSTAR.
AND *SPREAD* THE PIECES AMONG THE WORLDS AND REALMS.
THAT'S *RIGHT.* I DID.
BUT THE GATEWAY BEARS MY *FATHER'S* IMPRIMATUR. IT'S INFINITE.
IF YOU *DIVIDE* INFINITY, YOU DON'T MAKE IT ANY SMALLER.
YOU SAID WE WERE TO SEE FOR *OURSELVES.*
SO FAR I'VE SEEN *NOTHING* TO IMPRESS ME.
WELL, THE OBSERVER IS PART OF THE *SYSTEM,* I SUPPOSE. BUT IF YOU KEEP WATCHING THE *GATE*--
FSSSSSSH

DOES-- DOES THAT HAPPEN *OFTEN?*
NO. BUT THE LETTERS OF MY FATHER'S NAME ARE ALL THAT *HOLD* THE GATE OPEN.
NOW HE'S *GONE.* AND YESTERDAY THE LETTERS BEGAN TO FADE.
TO-- FADE?
WITH THE RESULTS YOU SEE. I DOUBT THE GATE WILL LAST MORE THAN A FEW DAYS. A WEEK AT MOST.
SO YOUR REALM WILL BE SEPARATED FROM TRUE CREATION. IS THIS YOUR *CRISIS?*
I DON'T *HAVE* A CRISIS. I'M TELLING YOU THIS AS A SIMPLE COURTESY. YAHWEH'S NAME IS WRITTEN ON EVERY *ATOM* OF HIS CREATION.
IT'S THE GLUE THAT HOLDS REALITY TOGETHER. AND WHEN IT'S GONE--
--*YOU* WILL BE TOO.
ALONG WITH EVERYTHING *ELSE* THAT LIVES HERE.

IN A *MELEE* THE BASIC MANEUVER IS TO STRIKE AND SHIFT *FOOTING.*
YOU LET YOUR ENEMY EXPOSE HIS *WEAKNESSES,* AND THEN YOU PLAY ON THEM.
GIVEN THE *CHOICE--*
--YOU DO *NOT* FIGHT ON HIS HOME GROUND.
YES. I CAN-- SEE IT. STUPID. STUPID TO *MISS* SOMETHING SO--
--BIG.

YOU'RE THE GUARDIAN OF THE *GREEN.* THE SPIRIT OF ALL THAT HAS ROOTS AND GROWS.
I-- I AM. AND YOU ARE *ELAINE,* OF THE SISTERS!
YOU HID YOURSELF FROM US SO *WELL.* YOURSELF-- AND SOMEONE *ELSE.*
THE *WIDOW.* THE KERA THEODMET. SHE IS MY *FRIEND* AND MY PROTECTOR.
I *LOVE* HER. LEAVE HER BE, AND I *PROMISE* THIS WILL END.
SPIRIT--
--THIS HAS *ALREADY* ENDED.

YOU'RE SO *YOUNG.* I GUESS BECAUSE THE WHOLE *WORLD* IS YOUNG.
SPIRIT, THE MAKER HAS ORDERED ALL THE *IMMORTALS* TO LEAVE HIS REALM. YOU'VE GOT TO *GO* FROM THIS PLACE.
I *CANNOT* GO FROM THIS PLACE, BECAUSE I *AM* THIS PLACE!
I *KNOW* WHAT THE MAKER HAS SAID. BUT I *DIE* WHETHER I STAY OR GO!
AND IN THE *GREEN*--
--ISN'T DEATH PART OF THE WAY THINGS *WORK?*
YES. IT IS. BUT I WAS AFRAID BECAUSE I HAVE NOT *KNOWN* DEATH BEFORE.
AND I WANTED TO HELP THE *KERA.* BUT I AM *READY* NOW, ELAINE.

WHAT'S *HAPPENING* HERE?
AUTUMN.
JUST... AUTUMN.
THE GUARDIAN SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD'S PLANT LIFE JUST *DIED.*
THE FOREST'S *MOURNING* FOR HIM.
AND THERE'S *ANOTHER* IMMORTAL UP AHEAD OF US. HE WAS HIDING HER TOO.
HE CALLED HER THE *KERA*--SOMETHING.
THEODMET? THE KERA THEODMET?
I WOULD SPEAK WITH YOU, ELAINE BELLOC.
THE REST OF YOU WAIT HERE.
OH. RIGHT. CAN WE TALK AMONGST *OURSELVES?*

WE ASCEND THE FLANKS OF THE MOUNTAIN. PAST THE TREE LINE.
I AM AWARE OF ELAINE BELLOC'S EYES ON MY BACK. OF THE QUESTIONS SHE HAS NOT YET ASKED.
TO BE AN ONLY CHILD-- THAT CREATES A DIFFERENT KIND OF BOND, PERHAPS.
THE LILIM ARE MORE A NATION THAN A FAMILY. THE LOYALTY WE FEEL FOR EACH OTHER IS TRIBAL.
I GUESS I'M STARTING TO SEE HOW THAT WOULD WORK.
I'M MEANT TO BE LOOKING OUT FOR EVERYBODY HERE. NOT THAT I'M DOING SUCH A GREAT JOB OF IT.
THIS JUST GOT PERSONAL, DIDN'T IT?
I BELIEVE--
YES.
THIS LAST ONE IS FOR ME TO DEAL WITH. LET ME DO IT ALONE--
--AND I WILL SAY NOTHING TO LUCIFER ABOUT WHAT YOU DID IN THE FOREST.

IT'S NO SECRET. I TOOK A *CUTTING.*
I KNOW.
SO HE CAN *LIVE* AGAIN SOMEWHERE ELSE. SOME DAY.
IF I TELL LUCIFER THE JOB'S *DONE,* AND THEN IT TURNS OUT *NOT* TO BE--
--HE'S LIKELY TO LOSE HIS SENSE OF *HUMOR.*
YOU WILL NOT SUFFER FOR *MY* DERELICTION.
I WILL SWEAR ON MY *SWORD* IF YOU REQUIRE IT, AND MY WORD IS--
TAKE IT AS READ. BE *CAREFUL,* MAZIKEEN.
YOU'RE SURLY AND SCARY AND I'VE HAD A *LOUSY* TIME WORKING WITH YOU.

IT WAS TO BE EXPECTED THAT SHE WOULD HIDE.
AND THAT SHE WOULD PROCLAIM THAT FACT AS LOUDLY AS SHE COULD.
"I AM ALONE NOW," SHE SAID.
"THOUGH I HAVE LOVED SO MANY, LAIN WITH SO MANY--"
"--BEREAVED JUST ONCE."
"KERA THEODMET."
KTANG
TANG
SHINNNNG
"WIDOWED BY GOD."
"AND EACH OF YOU MUST BE BOTH SWORD AND WHETSTONE."
"TO SHARPEN EACH OTHER'S ANGER."
"TO REMEMBER ALWAYS WHAT WAS TAKEN FROM YOU."
"THE TIME WILL COME TO STAND, MY LOVES."
"THOUGH WE WAIT A THOUSAND AGES ON OUR KNEES."

THIS DOESN'T LOOK MUCH LIKE THE INSIDE OF A *MOUNTAIN.*
NO.
AND THAT DOES NOT SOUND MUCH LIKE *LOVE,* OR DUTY.
I EXPECTED *MORE,* AFTER SO LONG A PARTING.
YOU EXPECT TOO *MUCH,* MOTHER.
YOU ALWAYS *DID.*

Lilith

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I MUST GO NOW, MY SWEETEST.
AYE. YOU SAID.
SHALL I VISIT YOU AGAIN SOON?
IF IT PLEASE YOU, WHY NOT?

WHICH ONE OF THEM IS *MINE?*
NONE OF THEM.
BUT YOU FATHERED *THAT* ONE.
WITH THE GREY EYES AND THE WILD *HAIR.*
WHAT ARE YOU *PLAYING* AT, WITH YOUR WHITTLED SPEAR?
WE'RE DIGGING OUT A BADGER. TO MAKE *SPORT* WITH IT.
AND THEN TO *EAT* IT.

YOUR MOTHER FAVORS A *DIFFERENT* KIND OF SPORT.
SPEAK NO *HARM* OF MY MOTHER.
IT IS TRUTH I SPEAK.
THAT *HOLE* YOU DROPPED FROM IS A COMMON HARBOR FOR ANY--
AHRR!
THAT WAS WELL DONE, LITTLE MONSTER.
I WANTED TO SEE IF YOU HAD YOUR FATHER'S *SPIRIT,* AND IT SEEMS--
I'LL VISIT YOU *AGAIN,* ANOTHER DAY. KEEP YOUR DISTANCE FROM THE SONS OF *HEAVEN.*
AND ENJOY YOUR FEAST.

YOU ARE *LILITH.*
YES.
I AM *IBRIEL,* OF THE DOMINIONS. AND MY COMPANION HERE--
I am samael.
called the *morningstar.*
LILITH, YOU HAVE *PEOPLED* THIS PLACE WITH THE OFFSPRING OF YOUR LUST. THE *STINK* OF YOUR OFFENSES REACHES EVEN UNTO HEAVEN.
AND THE HOST OF HEAVEN HAS DECIDED THAT THEY MUST *STOP.*
AND IF THE HOST DECIDES THAT THE *TIDES* MUST STOP?
WHAT THEN?
COME OUT OF THE *SUN,* ANGELS.
I'LL GIVE YOU WATER.
BUT THAT'S *ALL* I'LL GIVE YOU.

I KNOW YAHWEH KEEPS *SILENT* ABOUT THE CHOICES I'VE MADE. SO I ASSUME THAT GABRIEL IS MY ACCUSER.
IT MATTERS NOT.
WE SPEAK, AND ACT, AS ONE.
IS THIS SO? I HAD HEARD THAT YOU HAVE A VISION OF YOUR OWN, IBRIEL.
A SILVER CITY, THAT GABRIEL WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO--
KNOW THIS, *LADY.* WE ARE EMPOWERED OF THE HOST.
EMPOWERED NOT MERELY TO THREATEN, BUT TO *ACT.*
AND YET, UNLESS YOU ACT HERE AND NOW--
--TO TELL ME SO IS NO MORE THAN ANOTHER *THREAT.*
WELL, THE CHOICE LIES WITH YOU. FOR IF YOU DO NOT REPENT YOUR--
WHY DO YOU DO THESE THINGS, LILITH?
YOU WERE MADE FOR ADAM. WHY DO YOU *SOIL* YOURSELF WITH DEMONS?

WHY? BECAUSE IT *PLEASES* ME, I SUPPOSE.
I MAY HAVE BEEN MADE FOR ADAM--
--BUT I *LIVE* FOR MYSELF.
WHICH IS WHAT LIVING *MEANS.*
WE WILL *WITHDRAW,* AND LET YOU CONSIDER OUR WORDS.
AT LEAST NOW YOU'RE AWARE THAT HEAVEN STILL *WATCHES* YOU.
WERE WE NOT SENT TO *PUNISH* HER? THIS RESOLVES NOTHING.
IT RESOLVES MY *CURIOSITY,* WHICH IS WHY I CAME. IF GABRIEL WANTS A *SCOURGING,* HE'LL HAVE TO DELIVER IT HIMSELF.
COME AWAY.

"UNLESS YOU ACT HERE AND *NOW*"?
"WELL, TO THAT THERE WAS BUT *ONE* ANSWER, SURELY."
WHAT, TO PRESERVE OUR SENSE OF OUR OWN DIGNITY BY *KILLING* HER?
I DIDN'T SEE THE *POINT* IN THAT.
SAMAEL, WE *DISCUSSED* THIS IN CONCLAVE. WE REACHED A *DECISION*.
IF SHE CANNOT CONTAIN HER LUSTS, THEN SHE IS TO *DIE*.
BY DOING NOTHING YOU *ERODE* HEAVEN'S AUTHORITY.
HEAVEN'S AUTHORITY DERIVES FROM MY *FATHER*.
AND MY FATHER HAS NOT SPOKEN.
BROTHER, MUST WE GO DOWN THE SAME *PATH* EVER AND AGAIN?
YES, GABRIEL, IT SEEMS WE *MUST*.
SINCE YOU ALWAYS HEAD ME OFF BEFORE WE GET TO THE *END* OF IT.

YAHWEH HAS SAID NOTHING TO ANY OF US SINCE THE BUSINESS OF *CREATION* WAS FINISHED.
BUT HE FASHIONED US TO BE HIS HANDS AND HIS *TOOLS.* FOR US TO REMAIN *IDLE* WOULD THEREFORE BE A SIN.
SO WE ARE TO FINISH OUT *ETERNITY* TRYING TO SECOND-GUESS HIS INTENTIONS? TO BE HIS *TOOLS?*
AS IF THERE WERE SOME KIND OF *NOBILITY* IN SELF-ABASEMENT?
AND IS THERE *NOT?*
NONE THAT *I* CAN SEE. WE ARE HIS CHILDREN--HIS FIRST-BORN.
THE FREEDOM *HE* ENJOYS IS *OUR* BIRTHRIGHT TOO.
EVERYTHING DERIVES ITS LIFE FROM HIM. PERHAPS THE *SPARKS* SHOULD SEEK THEIR FREEDOM FROM THE FIRE.
OR MY SHADOW DECLARE AUTONOMY FROM MY *BODY.*
AND LO! WE SWERVE ASIDE *AGAIN,* INTO BARREN RHETORIC.
WHAT IS BARREN IS YOUR *AMBITION,* BROTHER.
I WILL SEEK A *RULING* FROM OUR FATHER ON LILITH.
AND ANOTHER--
--ON *YOU.*

THEY ARE *COMELY,* THE SONS OF HEAVEN.
MOST COMELY.
THEIR HAIR LIKE PRECIOUS *METALS.*
YOUR ANSWERS WERE UNACCEPTABLE.
WE MUST SPEAK *FURTHER.*
LIKE *SILK* THEIR SKIN.
MOST COMELY.
WE HAVE NOT--
--WE HAVE NOT *ESTABLISHED--*
IN FACE, IN FORM, IN FAITH, ALL *PERFECTION.*
AND YET--
--THEY DO NOT *KNOW* THEMSELVES.
NOT UNTIL THEY HAVE KNOWN *ME.*

I HAVE CONSIDERED--
--KILLING MY FATHER.
ASSUMING THAT WAS *POSSIBLE,* WHAT WOULD IT ACHIEVE?
IT WOULD SET ME *FREE.*
I WOULD STAND *ALONE,* THEN.
I THINK IT WOULD *DESTROY* YOU. YOU'D HAVE HIM HANGING OVER YOUR SHOULDER *FOREVER,* THEN.
YOU'D NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU *MIGHT* HAVE BEEN WITHOUT HIS INFLUENCE.
AYE, WELL. THERE'S THE *RUB.*
HIS INFLUENCE EXTENDS THROUGH *EVERYTHING.* THERE'S NOWHERE I CAN GO WHERE I WON'T MEET HIM.
THERE'S YOUR OWN *SPIRIT,* I SUPPOSE.
OR YOUR OWN WILL--
"WHATEVER IT IS THAT MAKES YOU *HATE* HIM."

IT WAS NOT MY *INTENTION* TO OFFER YOU DISHONOR.
WAS IT NOT?
WELL, BETTER THAN *KILLING* ME, AT ALL EVENTS.
WE DO AS WE ARE *TOLD.* WE OFFER UP OUR *OBEDIENCE* TO--
HUSH. IT MATTERS NOT.
WE'LL NOT QUIBBLE ABOUT WHAT YOU OFFER *GOD.*
CERTAINLY HE HAS NO *NEED* OF WHAT YOU OFFER ME.
WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE, YOUR CITY? A *FORTRESS?* A KEEP IN WHICH THE TRUTH COULD HOLD ITSELF *SAFE* FROM DEFILEMENT?
NO.
NOTHING LIKE THAT!
IT WOULD BE A FILIGREE OF SILVER.
A GREAT *HOSANNA* IN STONE AND CRYSTAL AND GLASS.
IT WOULD EXPRESS US. *DEFINE* US.
BUT THE HOST DO NOT BUILD.
THEY ONLY *MAINTAIN* WHAT HAS BEEN BUILT.
AND THERE'S AN *END* OF IT.

I sometimes WONDER, given that he knows what I'm thinking--
--why he hasn't dealt with me ALREADY.
THERE'S NO POINT IN TRYING TO FATHOM HIM, SAMAEL.
no POINT?
HE'S YOUR MAKER. THAT CAN'T CHANGE. TRY AS YOU MIGHT, YOU CAN NEVER BE YOUR OWN FATHER. YOUR OWN AUTHOR.
THE ONLY VICTORY YOU CAN WIN IS TO BE YOURSELF.
what SELF? a mind he made from whatever materials he had at HAND.
that runs around and around the same thoughts like a PLANET in its course.
NOT LIKE A PLANET.
"LIKE A STAR--
"--THAT SHINES WITH ITS OWN LIGHT."

I HAVE RUTTED WITH *THOUSANDS* OF MEN. I HAVE BECOME *ADEPT* AT GIVING THEM WHAT THEY THINK THEY NEED.
TO SAMAEL, WHOSE PASSION BURNED LIKE THE *SUN,* I GAVE PLEASURES ABSTRACT AND INTELLECTUAL.
IBRIEL SAW HIMSELF AS ALL *SPIRIT.* ALL COLD REASON AND LOFTY IMAGINING.
BUT THERE WAS A *CORNER* IN HIM WARMED BY THE LUST OF THE BODY--
--AND THERE I PITCHED MY *TENT.*
MY WOMB IS LIKE A *GARDEN,* WHERE EVERYTHING THAT IS PLANTED COMES TO FRUIT.
I KNEW WHAT WOULD *COME* OF THIS--
--BUT THEN THE LUST OF THE BODY IS MY JOY AND MY SUSTENANCE.

SOME LITTLE TIME LATER, THE RED SEA WAS WITNESS TO TWO CRIES--
--THE FIRST DEEP, THE SECOND *SHRILL.*
I'VE NAMED HIM *BRIADACH.*
I HOPE THAT *PLEASES* YOU.
A *CHILD?*
YOUR CHILD. BUT I'LL KEEP HIM HERE. HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS WILL HELP ME *RAISE* HIM.
HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS ARE *DEMON-SPAWN.* HE IS A *SIN* MADE FLESH.
HOW WILL I BE *FORGIVEN* FOR THIS? HOW WILL I *ATONE?*
IBRIEL, HE'S YOUR SON. IF THERE WAS SIN INVOLVED IN HIS MAKING, IT WAS *YOURS* AND MINE.
NO!
BE SILENT, WOMAN!

YOU!
YOU HAVE ENTRAPPED ME!
SEDUCED ME!
I NEVER WANTED THIS--
--AND I WILL NOT LET YOU--
I MUST *THINK* ABOUT THIS. I MUST DECIDE WHAT CAN BE *DONE.*
I'LL SEE YOU. OR-- OR SEND *WORD* TO YOU.
IBRIEL!
MOST COMELY--
--AND MOST *CRUEL.*

THE LILIM-- MY *CHILDREN*-- NUMBER A THOUSAND THOUSAND. SO I HAVE *WEPT* A THOUSAND THOUSAND TIMES.
BUT FOR THE NUMBERLESS LEGIONS OF THEIR *FATHERS,* NEVER. NEVER ONCE.
UNTIL *NOW.*
MOTHER?
MAZIKEEN, NO. NOT NOW. PLEASE--
MOTHER, DON'T *CRY.*
DON'T GO AWAY FROM US.
I WON'T *LET* THE ANGEL HURT YOU.
I WON'T LET HIM COME *BACK.*
WITH HIS STUPID *WINGS* AND HIS STUPID *PICTURES.*

"Like the grains of *sand* in the desert."
"Like the drops of *water* in the ocean, that cannot be *counted.*"
THE *LILIM?* SHE'D GIVE ME THE LILIM AS A *WORK-FORCE?*
So she said.
BUT WHY?
WHY NOW, WHEN I HAVE GIVEN OVER MY *SIN?*
Ibriel, you've stared at your *inner* visions too long. You're blind to the *world.* She wants to buy you back.
She's made her bid.
SAMAEL-- IS THIS A *LESSON,* THINK YOU? THAT *GOOD* CAN BE BROUGHT FORTH FROM EVIL?
If I were *given* to moralizing, I'd probably find a *different* lesson.
I'LL DO IT.
I'LL *BUILD* MY SILVER CITY.
IT IS YAHWEH'S WILL, I *KNOW* IT IS.

"THE SOUND OF CHISEL ON STONE WILL BE A *HYMN* TO HIS PRAISE."
"THE DUST THAT RISES WILL BE *INCENSE.*"
"FOR IT IS NOT A CITY, SAMAEL-- IT IS A *SACRAMENT.*
"AN ACT OF *COMMUNION.* YOU UNDERSTAND?"
"YAHWEH WILL COME THERE, AS *BEES* COME TO A WELL-MADE HIVE.
"BUT WHERE BEES BRING ONLY *HONEY,* HE WILL POUR THE CHRYSM OF HIS *GAZE* UPON US ALL.
"AND THAT WHICH WAS MY *SIN*--
"--BY THIS BLESSED *ALCHEMY* WILL BE PURIFIED."

OFF WITH YOU, RATS!
IF YOU'RE BEHIND ME WHEN I SWING I'LL STAVE YOUR SKULLS IN!
COME ON, BRIADACH. WE'LL CLIMB UP INTO ONE OF THE TOWERS AND LOOK DOWN FROM THERE.
IF AN ANGEL FLIES PAST WE CAN DROP STONES ON HIM.
WHY ARE WE MAKING A CITY FOR THEM, MAZ'KEEN? THEY'RE JUST BIRDS. BIG SILLY BIRDS WITH NOT ENOUGH FEATHERS.
WE'RE BUILDING IT BECAUSE MOTHER SAID SO.
BECAUSE ONE OF THE ANGELS IS HER SPECIAL FRIEND.
IT'S STUPID.
AND IT'S BORING.
AND IT GOES ON FOREVER.
AND THIS FOUNTAIN HERE WILL RUN WITH FIRE. I'LL ASK SAMAEL'S HELP WITH THAT.

AN AMUSING *CONCEIT.*
NO, IT IS A *SYMBOL.* THE FIRE IS SPIRIT, FOREVER UPWELLING, FOREVER REBORN.
IBRIEL.
AND IN SOME SENSE IT IS OURSELVES, TOO-- FOR AS FLAME IS, WE ARE ESSENCE WITHOUT SHAPE. ENERGY WITHOUT THE BOUNDS SET BY--
IBRIEL.
LISTEN TO ME.
IF THE HOST ARE TO *LIVE* HERE, THEN THE DEMONSPAWN MUST *DEPART.*
THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.
WELL, I HAD IMAGINED THAT-- IN A SPIRIT OF TOLERANCE--
AND YOU MUST GIVE HER *UP.*
OR I WILL PLACE AN *INTERDICT* ON THIS PLACE, SUCH THAT NO ANGEL WILL EVER ENTER IT.

GABRIEL, I HAVE *ALREADY* REPENTED OF MY SIN. IT HAS BEEN YEARS SINCE I--
FORGIVE ME. YOU HAVE MERELY FORGONE HER *COMPANY* A WHILE.
YOU MUST TELL HER THAT HER TOUCH IS *LOATHSOME* TO YOU. CURSE HER AND CAST HER OFF.
YOUR CITY, IBRIEL. IS IT TO BE A *TEMPLE,* OR THE PLEASANCE OF A *WHORE?*
FOR AS GOD IS MY WITNESS, IT CANNOT BE *BOTH.*
I--
--I WILL CAST HER *OFF.*
IT IS WELL DONE.
AND I WILL TELL THE HOST THAT THIS SHALL BE THEIR *DWELLING PLACE.*
THANK YOU, ARCHON.
YOU ARE MOST *WELCOME,* BROTHER.

a POOL OF FIRE?
A FOUNTAIN OF FIRE, ENDLESSLY UPWELLING.
WHAT SAY YOU, SAMAEL? YOU COULD DO IT WITH A GESTURE.
TO BE BLUNT, IT STRIKES ME as VULGAR.
IT IS A SYMBOL OF THE SOUL'S ENDLESS RISING.
PLEASE, SAMAEL. THIS IS THE REALIZATION OF MY DREAM.
IF THIS WERE YOUR DREAM, I'D EXPECT HER TO BE IN IT.
BUT I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW YOUR OWN MIND BEST.
SAMAEL, IT WOULD MEAN A GREAT DEAL TO ME.
WELL, I'LL THINK ABOUT IT.
AND I'LL LET YOU KNOW.

MASTER IBRIEL.
CHILD, YOU HAVE NO **BUSINESS** HERE. YOU MUST--
I TOLD MY **MOTHER** WHAT YOU SAID. AND SHE SENDS **ANSWER.**
"IF IBRIEL CAN GOVERN HIS **PASSION** SO EASILY, HE IS SURELY STRONG ENOUGH TO COMPLETE THE BUILDING OF HIS SILVER **HYPOCRISY** WITHOUT FURTHER AID FROM **ME.**"
YOU-- YOU **TOLD** HER WHAT I SAID TO GABRIEL? YOU **SPIED** ON ME? WHERE IS SHE?
OW!
SHE'S CLOSE BY, BUT SHE WON'T **SPEAK** TO YOU!
SHE WILL. SHE **MUST.** TAKE ME TO HER.
SHE **CANNOT** PULL BACK FROM THIS ENDEAVOR. SHE GAVE HER **WORD** TO ME.
YOU BROKE **YOUR** WORD.
THAT IS DIFFERENT.
SHE SWORE AN **OATH** BEFORE HEAVEN. HEAVEN WILL NOT **LET** HER RECANT IT.
LEAVE US, GIRL.
I'LL SPEAK WITH HER **ALONE.**

LILITH? BY CASTING YOU OFF I *SHIELD* YOU FROM GABRIEL'S WRATH.

BUT IF YOU LEAVE THE CITY UNFINISHED, I SWEAR TO YOU, YOU'VE LOST YOUR LAST *FRIEND* IN HEAVEN!
YOU *UNDERSTAND* ME? I CAN'T--
!?

AAAAHH!
MY FATHER'S *POISON* IS ON THE BLADE.
AND THE BLADE IS IN YOUR *HEART.*
UHH...
MY SILVER CITY...
MY...
BR... BRIAD...
MY...
MY S...
MY SSSSS...

THEY ARE NOT CHILDREN.
I WILL NOT HEAR THAT WORD USED HERE.
WHICH MAKES THEIR *CRIME* ALL THE MORE TERRIBLE.
IF THE SEED IS POISONOUS, WHAT WILL WE FIND IN THE *FRUIT?*
THEY ARE OF TENDER *YEARS.*
STILL, IT WOULD *TROUBLE* ME TO VISIT TOO HARSH A PUNISHMENT ON TWO SO YOUNG.
AYE, MICHAEL. AND TO BAPTIZE IBRIEL'S SILVER CITY IN A WELTER OF BLOOD SEEMS A POOR MEMORIAL.
YOUR SCRUPLES DO YOU *CREDIT,* BROTHERS.
AND I *SHARE* THEM.
THE CHILDREN OF LILITH WILL BE GIVEN EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO *REPENT* AND ATONE.
ONLY IF THEY *PERSIST* IN EVIL--
--WILL THERE BE ANY NEED FOR *BLOOD.*

SAMAEL.
MICHAEL.
YOU DID NOT JOIN YOUR VOICE WITH OURS IN COUNCIL.
I PREFER TO BE SURPRISED.
SO THERE'LL BE AN INAUGURATION? A CEREMONY OF SOME KIND?
AYE. AND THE FATE OF THE CHILDREN WILL BE DECIDED THEN.
BROTHER, ARE YOU CONTENT TO LIVE LIKE THIS?
WAITING ON OUR FATHER'S WORD, AND WORSHIPPING HIS SILENCE?
I AM... PATIENT.
I BELIEVE HE HAS A PLAN THAT INCLUDES US ALL.
I BELIEVE IT WILL UNFOLD ITSELF IN TIME.
IN TIME?
IN TIME FOR WHAT?
I'M NOT PREPARED TO WAIT.
YOU HAVE NO CHOICE, BROTHER.
OH, WE ALL HAVE A CHOICE.
THE ISSUE-- AS I SEE IT--
--IS WHICH OF US WILL BE PREPARED TO MAKE IT.

I'M *SCARED,* MAZ'KEEN.
OF THE ANGELS? DON'T BE, BRIADACH.
SEE HOW *EASILY* WE KILLED THAT ONE, JUST YOU AND ME?
THEN IMAGINE WHAT *MOTHER* WILL DO, IF THEY TRY TO HURT US.
BUT GOD LOVES THE ANGELS *BETTER* THAN US.
HE'LL MAKE *THEM* WIN.
WILL HE?
THEN MAYBE WE'LL HAVE TO KILL *GOD,* TOO.

I WILL HAVE MY *CHILDREN.*
LADY, I TELL YOU THIS THING CANNOT BE.
DO YOU SEE THIS *ARMY* AT MY BACK? TELL *THEM* IT CANNOT BE.
THEY ARE AS *NOTHING* BESIDE THE HOST OF HEAVEN.
IF THEY ATTACK US, THEY WILL BE SWEPT AWAY LIKE *DUST.*
THIS DUST IS *ARMED.*
THIS DUST IS A NATION--
--AND YOU WILL NEVER TAME OR QUELL IT.
YOU MUST WAIT UPON *JUSTICE.*
OH SO MUST *YOU,* ANGEL, SO MUST YOU ALL.
I'LL GIVE YOU ONE TURN OF THE *GLASS.*
THEN, IF MY CHILDREN ARE NOT *RETURNED* TO ME--
--WE WILL TAKE *BACK* WHAT WE MADE.

ANGELS! SONS OF YAHWEH! THIS IS A *SOLEMN* MOMENT.
YOU LOOK AROUND YOU AND ARE JOYOUS AT THE GIFT OUR DEAD BROTHER HAS BEQUEATHED TO YOU. THIS CITY ALL OF *SILVER.*
BUT HE HIMSELF WILL NEVER *SEE* IT WHOLE. HE HAS WALKED *BEFORE* US INTO THE MANSIONS OF THE SILENCE.
DISPATCHED THERE BY THE CHILDREN OF *LILITH.*
IBRIEL AND LUCIFER WERE SENT TO *END* THEM. BUT THEY WERE MERCIFUL.
IS MERCY A *VICE?* IT WOULD BE PAINFUL TO THINK SO.
BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MUST *JUDGE,* AND SOMETIMES *CONDEMN.* FOR IT IS ONLY THE SINEWS OF JUDGMENT THAT GIVE MERCY THE STRENGTH TO STAND.

REPENT OF YOUR *SIN,* MAZIKEEN, DAUGHTER OF LILITH. *ABASE* YOURSELVES BEFORE HEAVEN'S JUDGMENT SEAT.
BEG FOR THE *PARDON* OF THOSE YOU'VE WRONGED.
STUPID, HORRIBLE ANGEL.
I'M *GLAD* HE'S DEAD.
I'LL BE GLAD WHEN *YOU'RE* DEAD.
SO WILL *I!*
AND HOW CAN MERCY REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO *REFUSE* ITS EMBRACE?
HOW CAN MERCY *FIND* THOSE WHO STRIVE SO HARD TO HIDE FROM IT?
IT WRINGS MY *HEART* TO TAINT OUR SOLEMN JOY WITH DARKER EMOTION.
BUT WE HAVE TAKEN STRONG *POISON.*
NOW WE MUST TAKE STRONG *MEDICINE.*
?
He wished the fountain to run with *flame.*

IS THIS FLAME *ENOUGH,* BROTHER?

...OR DO YOU THINK HE WAS AIMING FOR A MORE *EXTREME* STATEMENT?

LUCIFER, YOU MAY NOT *INTERFERE* HERE. THE VOICE OF HEAVEN HAS *SPOKEN.*
no.
THE VOICE I HEAR IS ***YOURS,*** GABRIEL.
JUST AS THE ***SIN*** IS YOURS.
FOR YOUR VIRTUE IS NOT ***CONTENT*** UNLESS IT CAN INTIMIDATE AND ENSLAVE THE VIRTUE OF OTHERS.
WOULD YOU CHALLENGE ME BEFORE THE ENTIRE *HOST?*
CHALLENGE YOU? YOU'RE LIKE A DROP OF DEW ON A ***LEAF,*** BROTHER.
AND LOOK, THE SUN IS ***RISING,*** AND YOU CANNOT ***STOP*** IT.

ALL THE SUNS OF ALL THE WORLDS, IN FACT. SET THE CHILDREN FREE--
--OR THOSE SUNS WILL DANCE IN THIS FOUNTAIN, AND THE ASHES OF YOUR HOLINESS WILL MIX WITH THE ASHES OF YOUR CITY.
YOU CARE NOTHING FOR THE CHILDREN. YOU'RE JUST LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO DEFY ME.
I CARE FOR TRUTH. MY OWN TRUTH.
GOD IS MY TRUTH.
AND NOW GOD WILL JUDGE BETWEEN US.
NO.

MICHAEL, STAND BESIDE ME AND HELP ME TO *END* THIS.
I DO NOT WISH TO SEE *DIVISION* AMONG THE HOST, GABRIEL.
AND SO I HAVE KEPT SILENT.
I AM TO *BLAME* IN THIS.
FOR THEIR CRIME OF MURDER, IT IS MEET THAT THE CHILDREN OF LILITH SHOULD BE *EXILED* FROM THIS PLACE.
WE DON'T CARE.
WE DON'T EVEN *WANT* TO STAY IN YOUR FILTHY CITY.
THEN *LEAVE* IT.
PERHAPS MY BROTHER *SAMAEL* WILL ESCORT YOU TO THE GATE.
!
THIS IS A *TRAVESTY* OF JUSTICE.
JUSTICE IS MY FATHER'S PREROGATIVE.
THE REST OF US...
THE REST OF US CAN ONLY DO WHAT WE THINK IS *RIGHT.*

angels of the host! I *renounce* my name and my birthright. I am samael no longer.
now I am only what I was *made* to be--the *LUCIFER*. the bearer of the light and the fire.
and those of you who seek their *own* paths--
--may, if you care to, begin by following *mine*.
FRIEND LOOKED AT *FRIEND*, THEN. AND COMRADE CONSIDERED *COMRADE*.
A *SILENCE* FELL ACROSS THE PLAZA, SUDDEN AND HEAVY.
AS HE WALKED TOWARD THE GATE, THEY BEGAN TO FALL IN *BEHIND* HIM.
HE DIDN'T LOOK BACK.
HE DIDN'T SEEM TO *CARE*.

MOTHER!
THE LUCIFER *SAVED* US!
WITH *FIRE!*
SO NOW YOU'RE A PLANET THAT'S LEFT ITS *ORBIT.*
no.
as you said, I'm a *star.* I'll borrow light from no one.
until we meet *again,* Lilith.
HE LEFT ME, THEN. AND THE REBELS FOLLOWED HIM.
FOR A STAR DRAWS *MANY* THINGS IN ITS WAKE, WHETHER IT WILL OR NO.

THE PAST IS *SOIL.*
THE FUTURE IS WHAT *BREAKS,* CEASELESSLY, FROM THAT SOIL AND REARS ITSELF TOWARDS THE *SKY.*
IN HOPE...
...IN BESEECHING...
...IN FURIOUS *RAGE.*
WE CAN NEVER KNOW OF *WHAT* WE ARE THE SEEDS--
--UNTIL WE *FLOWER.*
END

To: Lucifer Morningstar

From: Gaudium of the Seventeenth Harmony (well, ex)
Hi.

I mean, greetings.

Being as how your ~~squeeze~~ Lieutenant, Mazikeen, daughter of Lilith, has gone awol, the team felt that I should give you the final score. Which was that we won.
We cleared out all the immortals from your universe with a couple of days to spare, so we awarded ourselves a holiday with the centaurs of River Holt.
And a ~~wild time~~ much needed rest was had by all.
HORSE FLESH
Seriously, though, Maz was right there with us until the bottom of the ninth. Then she took off and disappeared, with some talk about there being one last immortal who'd somehow got under our radar. The kera theodmet? Something like that.
Anyway, Elaine says we're good, but maybe you want to check in with her at some point and get the skinny on that one.
Then I come back and everyone's yammering on about God's name. I said "his name's Yahweh, there's no big mystery." But they're like, "no, no, no! Now that God's up and left us, his name is fading from the face of creation and then creation itself will shrivel up like some kind of salted slug and we're all gonna die..."
Well, whatever. I just do my job.
With respects and salutations and a tactful reminder that we haven't any of us been paid for this gig, I remain,
Your damned ex-cherub
Gaudium

I USED THE BALLPEEN HAMMER BECAUSE THE PAIN GETS TRAPPED BETWEEN THE WALLS.
IT COMES FROM A WORLD WHERE EVERYTHING IS AS HEAVY AS LEAD. FORTUNATELY, I SPEAK THAT LANGUAGE.
THERE WAS A SOUND THAT WAS LIKE "YOUR MEDICATION!" FIVE SOUNDS, REALLY.
AND THEY HAD SARAH'S VOICE.
THAT MADE ME DEPRESSED AFTER A WHILE. IN THE WORLD BETWEEN THE WALLS, I DON'T SEE SARAH THAT MUCH.
I WAS MISSING HER. I WAS WONDERING WHEN THIS WORLD WOULD END AND THE OTHER WORLD WOULD START AGAIN.
I ASKED THE MEN WHO CAME. ONE OF THEM SAID "JESUS CHRIST"--
--AND THREW UP SICK THAT SMELLED OF ORANGES.
AND I THOUGHT SARAH'S NOT GONNA LIKE THAT.
AND I THOUGHT IT'S TOO LATE NOW. (TOO LATE FOR WHAT, I WONDER?)
AND I THOUGHT I REALLY SHOULD'VE GONE BACK TO THE DOCTOR--
029684 265 1478
CHARLES W. GILMOUR
TAKE ONE TABLET FOUR TIMES DAILY
Risperidone 1mg
NO REFILLS
--WHEN THE BOTTLE DIDN'T RATTLE ANYMORE.

CALIFORNIA.
FZZZT
FZZZT
CLICK
CURLY? WHASSAMATTER?
WHAT'RE YOU DOING WAY OVER *THERE?*
GO BACK TO *SLEEP,* JILL.
IT'S JUST A *THOUGHT* THAT WILL NOT LET ME REST.
NO MORE THAN THAT.
THERE'S *OTHER* THINGS WE COULD DO BESIDES SLEEP, Y'KNOW?
I MEAN, IF YOU'RE *RESTLESS.*
I CONFESS I AM-- UNEASY.
SOMEONE IS *COMING.*
SOMEONE WE WILL NOT BE *HAPPY* TO SEE.

SHIT! YOU MEAN THE BITCH WITH HALF A *FACE?* MAZIKEEN?
IS SHE *FINALLY* GOING TO MAKE HER MOVE?
NO.
THIS FEAR HAS A DIFFERENT *TEXTURE* TO IT. COARSER. OLDER.
SOMEONE I KNEW LONG *AGO,* PERHAPS.
WELL, SINCE WE'RE BOTH UP-- AND SINCE FUCKING YOUR *BRAINS* OUT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE AN OPTION--
--I'LL GO FIX US SOME *COFFEE.*
COME *IN,* WOMAN.

YOU'RE *LATE,* AND LOOKED FOR.
THERE'S NAUGHT ON YOUR *TABLE* SAVE THIS SAD OFFERING THAT WE BROUGHT OURSELVES.

THE WOLF BENEATH THE TREE

PART 1 OF 4

MIKE CAREY
Writer

PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY
Artists

JARED K. FLETCHER- Lettering DANIEL VOZZO- Colors and Separations
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Based on characters created by GAIMAN, KIETH and DRINGENBERG

AUSTIN. THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR WEST TEXAS.
JUNE 12TH. 10.30AM.
YOUR HONOR, I *OBJECT.*
MY CLIENT'S ANSWER SHOWS YET *AGAIN* THAT HE'S NOT FIT TO PLEAD.
COUNSELLOR--
THAT IN FACT HE DOESN'T EVEN *UNDERSTAND* WHAT HE'S BEING ACCUSED OF.
COUNSELLOR, YOUR PRE-TRIAL SUBMISSIONS WERE *HEARD* AND PRONOUNCED ON.
PLEASE DON'T RAISE THEM *AGAIN* AT THIS POINT. MISTER GILMOUR, YOU WILL *ANSWER* THE QUESTION.
I DON'T THINK I *GET* THE QUESTION. I NEVER ACTUALLY *MET* GOD.
YET YOU TOLD DETECTIVE KRUEGER THAT GOD GIVES YOU *MISSIONS* TO CARRY OUT--
I NEVER MET HIM. NOT FACE TO FACE.
--AND THAT HE *MADE* YOU PICK UP THAT HAMMER.
ARE YOU NOW SAYING THAT YOU WERE SOMEHOW *MISQUOTED?*

GOD SOMETIMES *MOVES* ME-- KIND OF-- INTO ANOTHER *WORLD.*
WHERE THERE'S SOMETHING HE WANTS *DONE.*
I ALWAYS TELL *SARAH* BEFORE I GO. IN FACT, I'VE BEEN-- I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR HER BECAUSE--
YOUR WIFE IS *DEAD,* MISTER GILMOUR.
NO SIR. SHE'S *OUT* RIGHT NOW.
YOU *MURDERED* HER. WITH SEVENTEEN *BLOWS* FROM A BALLPEEN HAMMER.
AND YOUR SON, ROBERT-- HE WAS STILL *ALIVE* AT THIS POINT.
BOBBY. HIS NAME IS BOBBY.
HE HAD TO SIT THERE AND *WATCH,* KNOWING HE WAS GOING TO BE NEXT.
MEMBERS OF THE JURY, YOU RECALL THE *FINGERPRINT* EVIDENCE.
THE PRINTS-- CHARLES GILMOUR'S PRINTS-- FOUND ON THE HANDLE OF THE HAMMER IN *THREE* SEPARATE PLACES. WHERE HE HAD SHIFTED HIS *GRIP.*
AS HE STOOD *OVER* HIS WIFE AND CONTINUED TO RAIN BLOWS ON HER LONG AFTER SHE WAS *DEAD.*
WITH NO *PROMPTING* OF PITY. NO VISITATION OF *CONSCIENCE.*
YOU TALK VERY *GLIBLY* ABOUT GOD AND HEAVEN, MISTER GILMOUR.
BUT AS GOD IS *MY* WITNESS, IF THERE IS A HEAVEN--

"--YOU HAVE PLACED YOURSELF *FAR* OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF ITS MERCY."
AND WHAT *ELSE* DID MY BROTHER SAY?
BE *FRANK,* URIEL. NO WORDS OF *LUCIFER'S* CAN MOVE ME TO ANGER.
HE SAID, MICHAEL, THAT AS LONG AS THIS THRONE REMAINS *EMPTY,* CREATION WILL CONTINUE TO *DISINTEGRATE.*
HE SAID NOTHING WOULD SURVIVE. AT LEAST--
--NOTHING OF YAHWEH'S.NOTHING MY *FATHER* MADE. MY OWN CREATION WON'T BE TOUCHED.
I'LL KEEP THE BORDER OPEN FOR AS LONG AS I CAN-- BUT ONLY TO *MORTALS,* OF COURSE.
THE REST OF YOU WILL HAVE TO GET BY AS BEST YOU *CAN.*

AS IF HEAVEN'S HOST WOULD WAIT ON *LUCIFER'S* CHARITY.
ARE THERE *OTHER* PATHS OPEN TO US, MICHAEL? IT SEEMED FROM WHAT HE SAID--
THERE ARE OTHER PATHS.
SO MY FATHER HAS *ABANDONED* US TO OUR FATE. AND BY DOING SO, HAS *DOOMED* US.
STILL, WE ARE WHAT HE *MADE* US, URIEL.
HIS OWN MOST PERFECT *ECHOES.*
HIS OWN MOST *PERSISTENT* AFTERIMAGES.
I DO NOT KNOW WHAT LUCIFER'S *AGENDA* IS. BUT I WILL FIND OUT THE FULL TRUTH.
AND THEN I WILL STOP THIS--
--NO MATTER WHAT THE *COST.*

THIS PLACE IS *RENTED,* YOU SONS OF BITCHES!
I'M GONNA GIVE YOU A SLOW COUNT OF *TEN--*
--THEN IF I CAN STILL *SEE* YOU, I'M GONNA CUT YOU INTO DECORATIVE FUCKING *PASTRY* SHAPES.
SO. MY OPTIONS ARE TO PUT OUT YOUR *EYES--*
--TO PUT OUT THE *SUN--*
--OR TO *DISARM* YOU.
AAAAA!
NOW. I SEE YOU'VE JUST THE *ONE* HAND, WOMAN.
IF YOU WANT TO *KEEP* IT, CALL BERGELMIR TO ME. I'D HAVE *WORDS* WITH HIM.
I'M ALREADY *HERE,* FENRIS.
AH! MY COUSIN BERGELMIR.
THESE ARE MY FRIENDS, ABONSAM AND BET JO'GIE-- GODS OF *DECEIT* AND *SPITE* AND SMALL *DESTRUCTION.*

BE *MERCIFUL* TO THE WOMAN, FOR SHE DOES NOT *KNOW* YOU.
AND I HAVE BEEN YOUR *FRIEND,* EREWHILE, IN OTHER TIMES AND PLACES.
AND AM I NOT *BLESSED* IN SUCH FRIENDS? SO TRUE. SO STEADFAST.
SO *BRAVE.*
WATCH HIM *CLOSE,* FENRIS. SEE! HE WEAVES A RUNE.
BUT BERGELMIR KNOWS THAT EVEN *MAGICS* BREAK WHEN THEY TOUCH ME. HE'D NEVER BE SO FOOLISH.
IT WAS A *CALMING,* NOTHING MORE.
I WANT NO VIOLENCE HERE.
THE GODS *FORFEND,* COUSIN. SO. WE WILL WALK IN THE GARDEN. SPEAK OF THINGS *PAST.*
AND YOUR WOMAN WILL WAIT *HERE,* WITH ABONSAM AND BET. UNTIL WE RETURN.
I'LL-- I'LL BE BACK PRESENTLY, JILL.
OFFER OUR GUESTS SOME WINE. THEY'VE COME A *LONG* WAY.
I'LL GO AS FAR AS COFFEE.
INSTANT COFFEE.

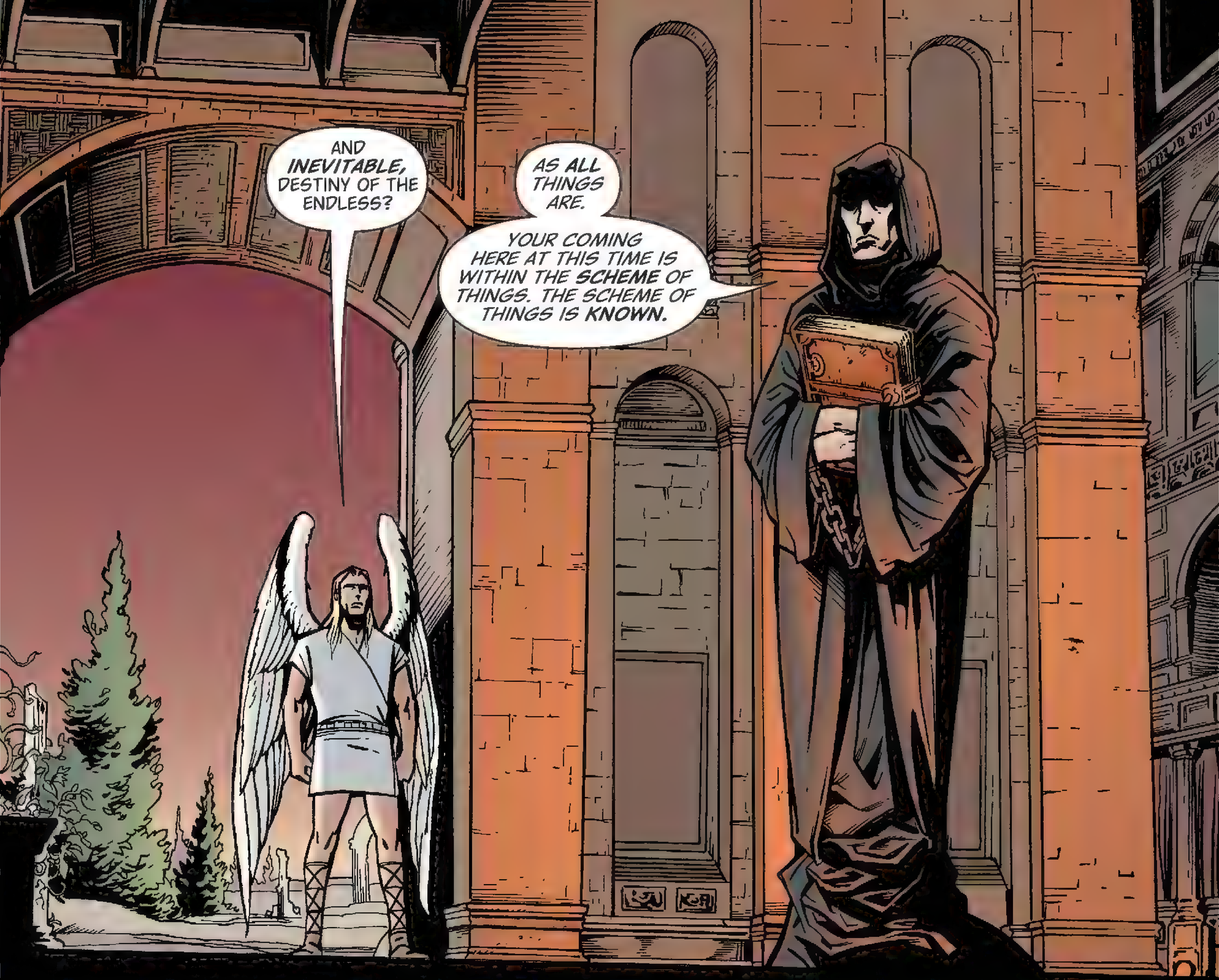
AFTER THEY PASSED *JUDGMENT* ON THE HAMMER, THEY TOOK ME TO A PLACE WHERE THEY THOUGHT IT COULDN'T *FIND* ME.
THEY TOOK ME BETWEEN THE *WALLS.*
MY NAME IS CHARLIE GILMOUR.
MY DOSAGE IS 5 MILLIGRAMS OF *CLOZAPINE* FOUR TIMES A DAY AND 10 MILLIGRAMS OF *VALPROATE* THREE TIMES A DAY.
THAT'S JUST *HERE,* THOUGH.
IN THE *REAL* WORLD, I'M ON RISPERIDONE.
SURE, CHARLIE. JUST TAKE THE FUCKING *PILLS,* OKAY?
ONE AT A TIME. I HAVE TO TICK YOU *OFF.*
WE HAVE TO TAKE THE *PILLS* ONE AT A TIME HERE. WE HAVE TO *TICK.*
THE CAMERAS *SQUEAK* A LITTLE AS THEY MOVE. HIGH UP ON THE WALL WHERE WE CAN'T *REACH.*
AND *BETWEEN* THE WALLS--
--IT'S ALL *QUIET* NOW.
QUIET STRETCHING FURTHER AND FURTHER. MADE OF *LEAD.*
SOMEONE'S *COMING.*

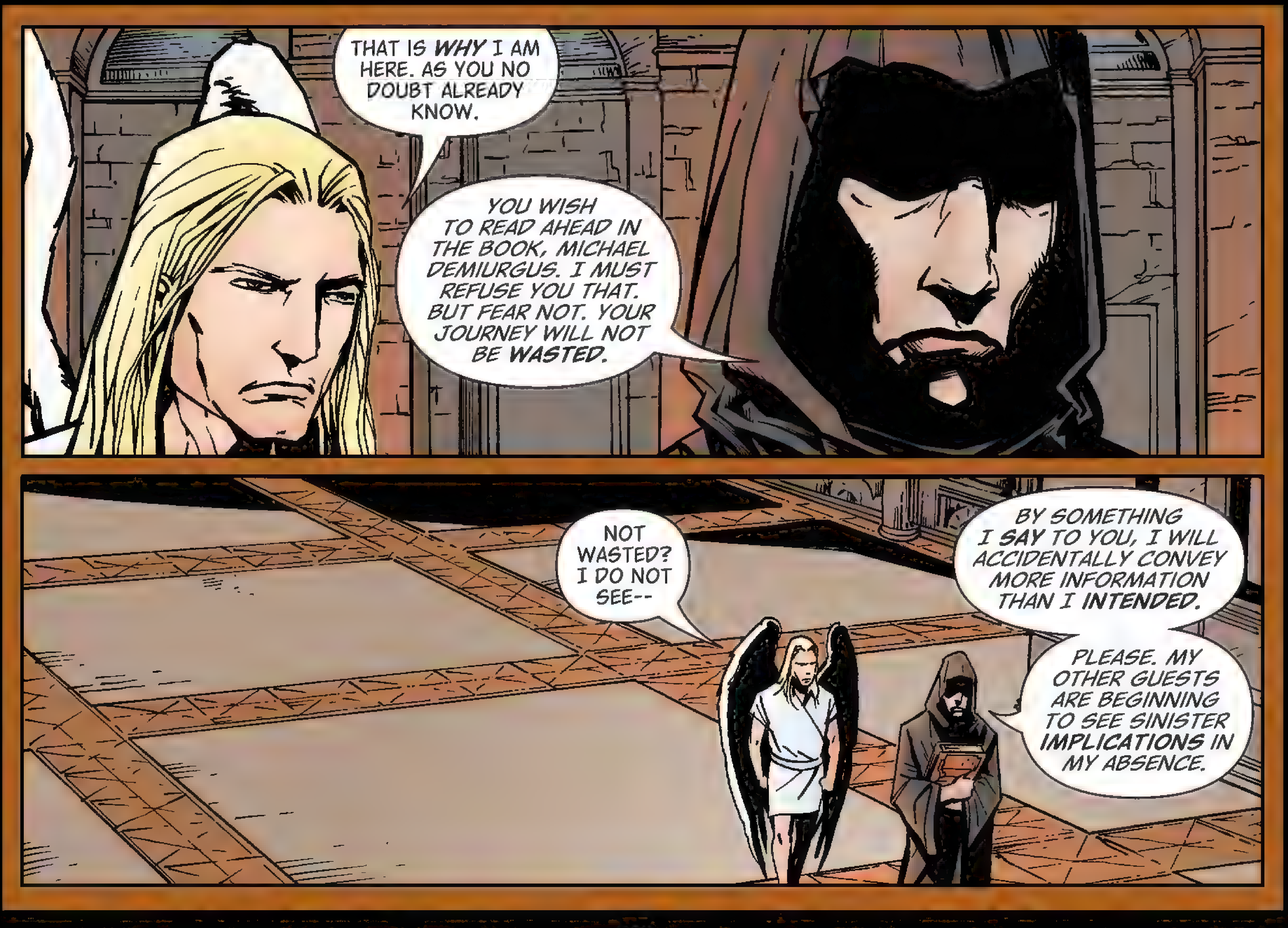
ALL THINGS MOVE TOWARDS THEIR END, BERGELMIR.
WOULDN'T YOU SAY?
I'VE ALWAYS SEEN THINGS MORE IN TERMS OF CYCLES.
YOU KNOW-- GROWTH, DECAY, GROWTH. THE BIG DANCE THAT GOES ON AND ON FOREVER.
YOU MISTAKE ME.
I WASN'T INDULGING IN COSMIC PLATITUDES.
HERE. NOW. THINGS MOVE TO A CLOSE. THE HOUR OF THE WOLF IS COME AT LAST.
SOME WILL TRY TO STOP IT.
THEY MUST FALL. THEY MUST PERISH. I MUST BE STRONG ENOUGH TO RIP OUT ANGELS HEARTS, FOR ANGELS WILL STAND AGAINST ME. ANGELS AND HALF-ANGELS.
YOU WANT SOMETHING FROM ME, FENRIS.
ONLY WHAT'S MINE ALREADY.
INFORMATION THAT I GAVE TO YOU.
KNOWING HOW GOOD YOU ARE AT SURVIVAL. KNOWING I'D NEED IT ONE DAY.

NINE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, I HOSTED A BANQUET.
FOR FORMER ENEMIES, MOSTLY. TO PROVE I BORE NO GRUDGES AGAINST THEM.
AYE, I REMEMBER THAT DAY.
AH, BUT I DON'T. I AM FENRIS, THE WOLF WHO DEVOURS, AND NOTHING ESCAPES MY TOUCH.
WHEN THERE IS NAUGHT ELSE TO DESTROY, I NEEDS MUST TURN ON MYSELF.
THAT OFFAL ON THE TABLE-- I THOUGHT THAT HE WAS ONE OF THEM, BUT I WAS WRONG.
TELL ME THEIR NAMES. THE ONES WHO ATE MY BREAD AND MY MEAT. AND I WILL LET YOUR WOMAN LIVE, SO YOU MAY HAVE THE USE OF HER UNTIL THE WORLDS FALL.
HE HAS THE NAMES.
HE SIGNS FOR US TO GO.
YEAH. SURE. IN A MINUTE.

IT'S *ALIVE,* ISN'T IT? LIVING SILVER.
WHEN YOU'RE *FUCKING* HIM, DOES HE EVER MAKE YOU--?
TAKE YOUR *PAWS* OFF ME!
GO GET YOUR CREEPY KICKS SOMEWHERE *ELSE!*
UFFFF!
BET JO'GIE. FIND SOME *FITTER* TIME FOR THIS. WE HAVE TO GO AND CHECK OUR *OTHER* CHARGE.
YOU WERE *PREGNANT* A WHILE BACK, WEREN'T YOU, SWEETMEAT?
AND YOU GOT *RID* OF IT.
WELL, GOOD JOB. COPULATION'S ABOUT *YOU,* NOT THE NEXT FUCKING GENERATION.
SPIKE THEM IN THE *WOMB,* OR STRANGLE THEM IN THE *COT.* IT'S ALL THE SAME.
EXCEPT IT WAS *TWINS.* AND YOU ONLY GOT THE *ONE* OF THEM.
ENJOY.

DESTINY'S GARDEN.
IF I TRY TO REACH YOUR DOOR BY WALKING THESE *PATHS,* I WILL BE HERE A LONG WHILE.
TIME *PRESSES.* I ASK RESPECTFULLY--
ENTER, MICHAEL DEMIURGOS.
YOU ARE **WELCOME** HERE.


AND INEVITABLE, DESTINY OF THE ENDLESS?
AS ALL THINGS ARE.
YOUR COMING HERE AT THIS TIME IS WITHIN THE SCHEME OF THINGS. THE SCHEME OF THINGS IS KNOWN.


THAT IS WHY I AM HERE. AS YOU NO DOUBT ALREADY KNOW.
YOU WISH TO READ AHEAD IN THE BOOK, MICHAEL DEMIURGUS. I MUST REFUSE YOU THAT. BUT FEAR NOT. YOUR JOURNEY WILL NOT BE WASTED.
NOT WASTED? I DO NOT SEE--
BY SOMETHING I SAY TO YOU, I WILL ACCIDENTALLY CONVEY MORE INFORMATION THAN I INTENDED.
PLEASE. MY OTHER GUESTS ARE BEGINNING TO SEE SINISTER IMPLICATIONS IN MY ABSENCE.

DESTINY, MY CONCERN IS FOR THE FUTURE **SURVIVAL** OF ALL CREATION.
I KNOW.
THEN GIVE ME MY ANSWER **NOW.**
OR SHALL I SIMPLY **TAKE** THE BOOK FROM YOUR HANDS--
--AND READ IT FOR **MYSELF?**
THE BOOK HAS NO **EXISTENCE** SEPARATE FROM ME. AND SO YOU DO **NOT** DO THIS.
THE GLASS WILL TURN **TWICE,** AND THEN I WILL COMMIT THE **INDISCRETION** I SPOKE OF.
IN THE MEANTIME, SIT. ENJOY THE **HOSPITALITY** OF MY HOUSE.
THOUGH THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE **STRAINED,** THERE MAY STILL BE SOME PLEASURE TO BE HAD--
--FROM A FAMILY **REUNION.**
HELLO, DAD.
HOW ARE THINGS WITH **YOU?**

LUCIFER.
michael.
YOUR PRESENCE HERE IS NOT **WELCOME.**
YOU HAVE ALREADY **STATED** YOUR POSITION. YOU WILL STAND IN YOUR GATEWAY AND **WATCH** US FALL.
SO CLEARLY YOU HAVE NO **INTEREST** IN POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.
IS that why **YOU'RE** here? to look for **answers?**
OF COURSE. AND I WILL NOT BE STAYED OR **DEFLECTED** BY YOU!
DAD, YOU'VE GOT IT **WRONG.**
LUCIFER'S NOT HERE TO STOP YOU OR **SABOTAGE** YOU. HE'S--
ELAINE BELLOC, YOU DO NOT **KNOW** HIM.
IF YOU KNEW HIM YOU WOULD BE **WARY** OF HIM.
HE'S HERE BECAUSE HE WAS **INVITED.** LIKE ME.
YOU'D BETTER SIT **DOWN.**

"NO VISITATION OF CONSCIENCE."
SO.
CHARLIE.
"NO PROMPTING OF PITY."
HOW DO YOU FEEL YOUR FIRST *DAY* WITH US HAS GONE?
HAVE YOU FOUND YOUR *FEET* YET?
THERE ARE *ECHOES* HERE.
I'M *WAITING* FOR SOMEONE.
BUT NONE OF THEM HAVE *FACES.*
WHAT? A *VISITOR?*
BUT YOU DON'T HAVE ANY LIVING *RELATIVES,* DO YOU?
NOT IN *THIS* WORLD.
IN THE *OTHER* WORLD I'VE GOT SARAH. AND MY SON, BOBBY.
WELL, IT'S GOOD THAT YOU'RE COMING TO *TERMS* WITH THEIR DEATHS.
I'LL SEE YOU FOR A FULL SESSION *TOMORROW.* YOU CAN TAKE HIM STRAIGHT TO HIS *CELL,* DON.
YES, DOCTOR SPEARS.

I *READ* ABOUT YOU, GILMOUR. ABOUT HOW YOU KILLED YOUR KID AND ALL.
LOST MY *OWN* KID ABOUT A YEAR AGO. LEUKEMIA. YOU STEP OUT OF LINE, I'LL BREAK YOU AND *LAUGH* WHILE I'M DOING IT.
THE MAN WITH THE *FEATHERS.* IS HE--?
FEATHERS. RIGHT.
DON'T PISS ME *OFF.*
ONE SECURE. TWELVE-OH-TWO.
SLEEP *TIGHT,* GILMOUR.
RATCH-TCHIK

THE AIR-- THE AIR WAS SO STILL I THOUGHT I'D WALKED INTO A CATHEDRAL. AS THOUGH THERE WAS A CEILING SO HIGH UP I COULDN'T SEE IT.
AS THOUGH SOMEONE WAS ABOUT TO CLEAR HIS THROAT AND START IN ON A SERMON.
IT'S FUNNY.
TO GET OUT FROM BETWEEN THE WALLS-- TO SEE SARAH AND BOBBY AGAIN--
--I SHOULD'VE BEEN SO *HAPPY.*
BUT IT FELT LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD.

PHILADELPHIA.
I DON'T NORMALLY *TALK* TO PEOPLE ABOUT THESE THINGS. ABOUT THE *CHILDREN*.
BUT FOR SOME REASON I JUST *TRUST* YOU.
THE THING IS-- I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND THE MODERN WORLD.
YOU KNOW. KIDS CARRYING *GUNS*, AND DEALING DRUGS. TEN-YEAR-OLD GIRLS WEARING *THONGS...*
BUT THEN, IF I'M HONEST--
--THERE WAS A LOT I DIDN'T GET ABOUT THE *OLD* DAYS, TOO.
THE UNTRIED BOYS GOING OFF IN THE *DRAGON* SHIPS.
LAUGHING. JOKING WITH EACH OTHER. AS IF IT WERE A *GAME*.
AND WHETHER THEY CAME BACK OR NOT, THEIR *YOUTH* WAS OVER.
ABRIDGED. ANNULLED. WASHED AWAY IN *BLOOD* AND OFFERED TO THE *FIRE*.
WOTAN KNOWS, IT'S NOT AS IF I *MISS* THAT.
IT'S NOT AS IF I CAN PRETEND THAT THINGS WERE EVER *BETTER*.

WHAT ABOUT *YOU.* ARE YOU STAYING HERE LONG?
NO. JUST FOR *TODAY,*
I'M THE *BAIT,* IDUN. AND THE COVER, TOO.
I FILL YOUR EYES AND FOX YOUR SENSES SO THAT *FENRIS* CAN GET IN CLOSE.
FENRIS? FENRIS THE--
AAAAHH!
YES. HIM.
THE *WOLF.*
YOU'RE A GOD OF YOUTH, IDUN.
TO BE HONEST, YOU WERE GETING A BIT *OLD* FOR THE JOB ANYWAY.
FENRIS. HAH!
THEN THE WOMAN HAS BEGUILED ME TO MY DEATH.
THAT'S WHAT BET JO'GIE *DOES.*

AND THIS IS WHAT *I* DO.
BUT I THOUGHT OUR DIFFERENCES *SETTLED.*
I ATE AT YOUR TABLE!

THE WOLF BENEATH THE TREE

PART 2 OF 4

MIKE CAREY Writer
PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY Artists

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CHRISTOPHER MOELLER- Cover Painter MARIAH HUEHNER- Editor
Based on characters created by GAIMAN, KIETH and DRINGENBERG

TEXAS.
GOD HAS SHOWN ME THE *WAY* AGAIN.
BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE *MEANT.*
THE WALLS FELL *DOWN* AND THE EARTH AND THE SKY OPENED UP.
AND SARAH AND BOBBY WERE THERE BENEATH THE TREE, *WAITING* FOR ME.
I-- I'VE BEEN SO MIXED UP SINCE THEY CHANGED MY MEDS.
I'VE BEEN MISSING HER REAL BAD. I'M SCARED SOMETHING'S HAPPENED TO HER.
HEY, CHARLIE-- YOU'RE BLOCKING THE FUCKIN' *TV.*
SHUT *UP!*
SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP!

SO WHAT DO *YOU* THINK, DOCTOR SPEARS?
IS GILMOUR *ADJUSTING?*
I'D HAVE TO SAY *NO,* BURCH.
IT'S STRANGE. IF ANYTHING HIS DELUSIONAL SYSTEM IS GETTING *MORE* ENTRENCHED.
HE'S NOT RESPONDING TO THE *CLOZAPINE.* HE MIGHT AS WELL BE POPPING M&Ms.
HE HAS CONVULSIVE FITS, HEARS AT LEAST *SEVEN* DISTINCT VOICES INCLUDING GOD'S, AND GOES ON DELUSIONAL *QUESTS.*
WELL WE'RE NOT A HOSPITAL. THERE'S ALWAYS *SOLITARY.*
QUESTS FOR *WHAT,* EXACTLY?
FOR A *TREE.*
WITH *STARS* HANGING FROM ITS BRANCHES.

THE HOUSE OF *DESTINY* OF THE ENDLESS.
NOW.
INVITED? YOU WERE *SUMMONED* HERE?
I DO NOT *UNDERSTAND.*
IS IT *THAT* SLIPPERY A CONCEPT, MICHAEL?
DESTINY TOLD ME THAT SOMEONE HERE WOULD NEED MY HELP.
AND I'M ASSURED I'LL *LEARN* SOMETHING TO MY ADVANTAGE.
SO-- MUCH AGAINST MY BETTER *JUDGMENT*-- HERE I AM.
BUT DESPITE THE *URGENCY* OF MY MISSION-- THE MAGNITUDE OF WHAT IS AT STAKE--
--NO INVITATION WAS ISSUED TO *ME.*
YOU WERE ALREADY **COMING.** *IT WOULD HAVE SERVED NO PURPOSE.*
PLEASE. SIT AND EAT.

I DID NOT *COME* HERE TO BE FED OR ENTERTAINED. I CAME TO SEE WHETHER OR NOT CREATION COULD BE SAVED.
AND I FIND YOUR *ANTICIPATION* OF HOW I WILL ACT PRESUMPTUOUS.
I SYMPATHIZE, IT *IS* HARD TO TAKE.
I REGRET ANY OFFENSE, MICHAEL. I CAN ONLY REPEAT THAT YOU WILL HAVE YOUR ANSWER SOON.
IN THE MEANTIME--
ENOUGH! I WILL SIT, AND BIDE MY *TIME.*
DESTINY, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT A SMALL *WAGER?*
BEFORE THIS MEAL IS OVER, I'LL DO SOMETHING THAT *ISN'T* WRITTEN IN YOUR BOOK.
ALL THINGS ARE WRITTEN THERE. THE WAGER WOULD BE MEANINGLESS.
BUT JUST FOR THE *HELL* OF IT-- SO TO SPEAK.
SINCE ALL THINGS ARE *PREDETERMINED,* I DO NOT GAMBLE.
THEN GAMBLE THAT THEY'RE *NOT*, AND YOU CAN'T LOSE.
ANOTHER GLASS OF *TESTOSTERONE,* ANYONE?

CALIFORNIA.
JILL?
I'M *LEAVING* NOW.
I *BEG* YOU TO COME WITH ME. THERE IS NOTHING TO STAY FOR HERE.
THE ONLY PLACE FROM WHICH TO WATCH THE END OF THE *WORLD* IS ANOTHER WORLD.
FENRIS IS THE VERY *EMBODIMENT* OF RUIN AND DESTRUCTION.
AND HE WALKS YOUR EARTH AGAIN FOR A *PURPOSE.* YOU UNDERSTAND?
THIS THING THAT'S INSIDE YOU CAN BE DRIVEN OUT. YOU'VE ALREADY *PROVED* THAT.
AND I HAVE-- *FRIENDS* WHO MIGHT HELP.
THEN THE GODS BE WITH YOU, JILL PRESTO-- PRESENT COMPANY *EXCEPTED,* FOR BERGELMIR OF THE JOTUN WILL BE FAR AWAY.
BUT I WILL NOT FORGET YOU *SOON.*

COLORADO.
IDUN. NJORD. LIFTHRASIR. ARE YOU TELLING ME YOU DON'T SEE THE *PATTERN?*
IT'S EVERYONE WHO WENT TO THAT FUCKING *BANQUET* OF HIS.
YEAH, WELL I DIDN'T *ASK* FOR YOUR OPINION.
YOUR OPINION ISN'T WORTH THE SPIT YOU *SPEND* ON IT.
I DIDN'T *ASK* FOR MORE COALS.
NO SIR, BUT IT'S TEN O'CLOCK.
I HAVE TO DO THIS ON THE *DOT.* I'M SORRY, SIR.
THEN DO IT AND GET THE FUCK *OUT.*
I WILL, SIR.
NOT A *PROBLEM,* SIR.
GODDAMN MORON.
SSSSSSSS

YES. THE *RECONCILIATION DINNER.* THE BIG GROUP HUG.
WHAT? WELL MAYBE HE CHANGED HIS *MIND.*
NO. I LENT MY MIND TO *YOU,* SKULD. THAT WAS WHAT YOU ATE, WHEN YOU ATE AT MY TABLE.
MY FLESH. MY SOUL. MY MEMORIES.
AND NOW I NEED THEM *BACK.*

YOU DON'T NEED TO STAND THERE WITH YOUR *LIPS* PURSED, ABONSAM.
YOU CAN ALWAYS LOOK *AWAY.* OR GO AND DO SOMETHING *USEFUL.*
IT'S TRUE I FIND THIS *WASTEFUL.* BUT I KNOW WHY IT WAS NECESSARY.
LEAVE THE *REMAINING* GODLINGS TO ME.
IF WE'RE TO GET TO WHERE WE'RE GOING, WE NEED TO PREPARE OUR *CHARIOT,* TOO.
BRING ME THE *MADMAN.*

SO-- UMM-- ARE THINGS GETTING BACK TO *NORMAL* NOW IN THE SILVER CITY?
I MEAN, AFTER THE DAMAGE THE *TITANS* CAUSED?
THE TERM *NORMAL* NO LONGER HAS A MEANING, ELAINE.
GOD HAS ABANDONED US, AND AS A RESULT THE WHOLE OF *CREATION* IS BEGINNING TO UNRAVEL.
IT-- IT IS? I DIDN'T *HEAR* ABOUT THAT.
IS THAT *TRUE?*
ONLY *YAHWEH'S* CREATION. IT DEPENDS ON THE LOGOS-- THE WORD OF GOD-- FOR ITS EXISTENCE.
MY *OWN* COSMOS WON'T BE AFFECTED.
AND THEREFORE IT DOES NOT *MATTER.*
AS ANY-THING THAT DOES NOT TOUCH *YOU* DOES NOT MATTER, LUCIFER.

BUT IF THIS IS THE END OF EVERYTHING, YOU'D **KNOW,** WOULDN'T YOU?
I MEAN, WE'D BE ON THE LAST PAGE OF THE **BOOK.**
YES. I WOULD KNOW.
THAT WAS PRECISELY WHY I ***CAME.*** TO KNOW WHETHER CREATION CAN BE SAVED.
WHETHER THERE IS ANY ***POINT*** IN FURTHER STRIVING.
IT SEEMS LIKE A VERY FAIR ***QUESTION.***
PERHAPS. I HAVE NO **OPINION** IN THAT REGARD.
BUT FAIR OR UNFAIR, I CHOOSE NOT TO **ANSWER** IT.
TO READ ALOUD FROM THE BOOK MAKES THE BOOK AN **ELEMENT** IN THE STORY IT TELLS.
THE DANGER INHERENT IN **THAT** IS AS GREAT AS THE THREAT YOU SEEK TO ADDRESS.
THAT THIS IS A **TURNING** POINT IN THE HISTORY OF CREATION IS SELF-EVIDENT.
THE VERY **SCRIPT** IN WHICH THE BOOK IS WRITTEN CHANGES AFTER THIS POINT.
AT SUCH A **JUNCTURE,** THE SLIGHTEST WORD OR GESTURE COULD **TIP** THE BALANCE.

THEN THERE *ARE* MORE PAGES TO COME.
EVERYTHING TURNS OUT--
THE *SCRIPT?*
YOU SAY THE SCRIPT IS TO *CHANGE?* IS THIS NOW? SOON?
MY WORDS WERE ***THOUGHTLESSLY*** *SPOKEN, ARCHON.*
PAY THEM NO ***HEED.***
PLEASE-- EXCUSE ME. I'D LIKE TO *TALK* TO HIM.
THANKS FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY.
YOU ARE ***WELCOME,*** *ELAINE BELLOC. IT WAS SCANT ENOUGH.*
DAD! WAIT!
and then there were *two.*
as you *intended* from the start.

AT LAST THE *NIGHT* COMES.
TWENTY *SECURE.*
TWENTY'S WHAT I'M HEARING.
LIGHTS OUT ON *FOUR.*
AND THEY FADE THE LIGHTS DOWN SO WE CAN SEE WHAT'S *UNDERNEATH.*
MY NEED FOR HER IS WHAT BRINGS ME HERE.
THE WAY SHE ALWAYS *HELD* ME, WHEN I WAS SCARED.
THE WAY SHE TOUCHED MY FACE, LIKE I WAS FRAGILE AND SHE WAS SCARED OF *BREAKING* ME.
AND SHE'S HERE!
SWEET JESUS SHE'S HERE!

SARAH!
SARAH, IT'S ME! IT'S *ME!*
OH GOD, I WAS REALLY STARTING TO *WORRY* ABOUT YOU.
IT'S BEEN SO LONG, AND THE DOCTOR SAID YOU WERE *DEAD,* BUT I KNEW--
WELL THAT WAS A *MEAN* THING TO SAY.
UNLESS-- YOU KNOW-- IT WAS *TRUE,* OR SOMETHING.
YOU'RE NOT *SARAH.*
NOT USUALLY. I MEAN, SOME DAYS IT GETS SO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE PRETTY MUCH EVERYBODY.
IT'S BECAUSE I THINK IN DIFFERENT VOICES. I HAD A *FISH* ONCE, BUT IT DIDN'T REALLY HELP.
I'M PRETTY *ANGRY* WITH SOMEBODY.
I HOPE IT'S NOT *YOU.*

RATCH TCHIK
THIS IS REALLY *EXTRAORDINARY.* TRANSFERRING A PRISONER IN THE MIDDLE OF THE *NIGHT.*
DON'T LOOK AT *ME,* MAN. I JUST *WORK* HERE.
I MEAN, WHAT'S THE *RUSH?*
ACCESS TO *COUNSEL.* HIS ATTORNEY ARGUED THAT A SIXTEEN HUNDRED MILE ROUND TRIP DIDN'T *CUT* IT.
WANTS TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT THE *APPEAL* OR SOMETHING.
BUT-- GILMOUR HASN'T *LODGED* AN APPEAL.
THE PAPERWORK WOULD HAVE TO GO THROUGH *ME.*
WELL, THAT'S TOO *BAD.* IT REALLY IS.
IF YOU'D BEEN JUST A *LITTLE* MORE STUPID, DR. SPEARS--
--YOU MIGHT HAVE LIVED TO BE A WHOLE LOT *OLDER.*

I GET ANGRY SOMETIMES, AND I DO *SCARY* THINGS. AT LEAST I *THINK* I DO.
OR MAYBE THAT'S MY *BROTHER.* THIS IS A *NICE* PLACE. NOT TOO COLD, NOT TOO ORANGE. IT REMINDS ME OF AN *OCEAN* I MADE ONCE.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY *WIFE.* I DREAMED I MET HER IN A PLACE LIKE THIS.
THAT'S IT! *THAT'S* WHAT I'M ANGRY ABOUT.
THANK YOU!
IT'S NOT *YOUR* DREAM. IT'S NOT EVEN YOUR-- SOMETHING ELSE BEGINNING WITH D. MY ONE.
THEY'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO *DO* THAT. I SHOULD-- I SHOULD PROBABLY--
OOH, LOOK. THOSE ARE *STARS.*
THIS TREE'S GOT STARS IN IT. ISN'T THAT *PRETTY?*
AND CHAINS. AND BRICKS. I WONDER HOW BIRDS MAKE THEIR *NESTS* WITH STUFF LIKE THIS?
MAYBE THERE *AREN'T* ANY BIRDS HERE. THAT'S KIND OF SAD.

IT WASN'T REAL.
IT WASN'T HER.
I'M STUCK BETWEEN THESE WALLS, IN THIS HOUSE WHERE SHE'S NEVER LIVED.
AND I'M SEEING THINGS THAT *AREN'T* THERE AGAIN.
BECAUSE OTHERWISE MY DOOR IS OPEN. AND I CAN JUST--
HI, CHARLIE.
WE'VE COME TO TAKE YOU TO THE *REAL* WORLD.

IT'S REALLY NOTHING PERSONAL.
I FIND YOU OFFENSIVE AS A CONCEPT.
EVEN THOUGH I KNOW YOU'RE REALLY JUST A SIDE EFFECT.
INDEED? OF WHAT?
OF MY FATHER. OR RATHER, HIS DETERMINISTIC APPROACH TO THE ACT OF CREATION.
CAUSE AND EFFECT ARE USEFUL TOOLS. BUT THEY'RE NOT THE FOUNDATION YOU BUILD ON.
NOT UNLESS YOU WANT TO BUILD A PRISON.
I DO NOT SEE THE ANALOGY. BUT MY OWN PREFERENCE WOULD ALWAYS FAVOR A PRISON--
--OVER, SAY, AN ASYLUM.
AND NOW IT DOES BEGIN TO BE PERSONAL.
YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT MY CREATION.
I AM EXPLORING YOUR METAPHOR. THAT IS ALL.

FORGET THE METAPHOR.
LET ME USE A VISUAL AID.
RRRIP

and now we're both in the dark.
NO.
NOW YOU LOOK AT THE ASHES.
FENRIS
YGGDRASIL
AND NOW YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND.

MW KALUTA 04

"YOU MUST TELL US EVERYTHING."
"I-- I'LL TRY."
MICHAEL!
MICHAEL, STOP!
"BECAUSE WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THIS."
"YES. I KNOW."
"I CAUGHT UP WITH HIM ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF HEAVEN."
"I CALLED OUT TO HIM TO STOP."
FATHER!
"AND HE TURNED TO LOOK AT ME."
YOU'VE THOUGHT OF A WAY TO HOLD THE UNIVERSE TOGETHER.
TELL ME WHAT IT IS, AT LEAST. IN CASE IT GOES WRONG. IN CASE SOMETHING HAPPENS TO YOU.
CHILD. ELAINE. GO FROM THIS PLACE.
I BLESS THE PATH THAT LIES BEFORE YOU.
AND I WOULD THAT I HAD KNOWN YOU BETTER.

"I FOLLOWED HIM *INSIDE.* AND I OPENED MY MOUTH TO *SPEAK,* BUT THEN--
"--THERE WAS NO *POINT.* IT WAS TOO *LATE* TO SPEAK.
"THE ROOM WAS FULL OF VOICES. THE *SAME* VOICE, OVER AND OVER ITSELF, A MILLION *TIMES.*
"AND I WAS HEARING IT WITH MY WHOLE *BODY.* I CAN'T DESCRIBE IT. IT WAS-- TERRIBLE.
IT WAS *GOD.* THAT ROOM IS CALLED THE *LOGOS,* AND IT IS WHERE HIS WORDS LIVE.
GO *ON.*
I'M NOT SURE THAT I *CAN* GO ON.
I'M NOT SURE THAT I CAN *EXPLAIN* IT.
"HE LAY DOWN ON THE FLOOR. IN THAT-- PLACE FULL OF NOTHING BUT *NOISE.*
"CURLED *UP* LIKE A CHILD.
"HE CLOSED HIS *EYES,* AND HE--
"--HE *SLEPT.* HE WENT TO SLEEP."

"AND THE POWER THAT WAS IN HIM SPILLED *OUT* THROUGH THE UNIVERSE.
"AND *BECAME* US ALL."

THE WOLF BENEATH THE TREE

PART 3 OF 4

MIKE CAREY Writer
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Based on characters created by GAIMAN, KIETH and DRINGENBERG

I DO NOT *UNDERSTAND.*
I THINK I *DO,* A LITTLE.
THANK YOU, ELAINE BELLOC, FOR *TEACHING* ME THIS MYSTERY.
EXAMINE YOUR OWN SUBSTANCE. OR THAT OF ANYTHING YOU SEE--STARS, STONES, WATER, AIR--
LOOK *CLOSE* ENOUGH AND YOU WILL SEE MICHAEL'S WILL *WORKING* THERE.
THAT IS *IMPOSSIBLE!* WHAT YOU SUGGEST, ONLY *GOD* CAN DO.
HE IS THE *DEMIURGE.* GOD *CHOSE* HIM AS HIS SECOND.
NOW, AS GOD'S MARK *FADES* AND CREATION FALTERS, MICHAEL *RENEWS* IT MOMENT BY MOMENT.
HE WRITES GOD'S *NAME* AFRESH ON EVERY ATOM OF EXISTENCE.
INCREDIBLE. BY THIS *SACRIFICE,* HE--
CALL IT WHAT YOU *WILL,* URIEL.
THE *WOLF* IS AT THE DOOR.
AND IT'S NOT GOING TO *WORK.*

I'M IN A DREAM.
FENRIS.
I'M IN A DREAM WHERE NOTHING MAKES SENSE, BUT EVERYTHING SEEMS TO MEAN SOMETHING.
SEE, WE HAVE BROUGHT HIM.
GILMOUR. YOUR CHARIOT.
LIKE COMING OFF MY MEDS.
THE SAME CRYSTAL-CLEAR SHARPNESS TO EVERYTHING. THE SAME FEAR.
LEAVE HIM, ABONSAM.
LIKE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? AND HOW MUCH OF THIS IS REAL?
SO YOU'RE THE MADMAN. THE MURDERER.
YOU'VE ARRIVED TOO LATE TO EAT. SEE, THERE'S NOTHING LEFT.
I'M NOT HUNGRY. AND I'M NOT A MURDERER.
YOU COULDN'T TAKE MUCH OF THIS FOOD IN ANY CASE.
BUT A LITTLE MORSEL WILL SAVE ME A WORLD OF EXPLANATION.
HERE, MADMAN. EAT.
BE MORE THAN MAD. BE MORE THAN MAN.

IT TASTES-- NOT LIKE MEAT. LIKE SOMETHING *ELSE.* LIKE SPICES.
SARAH RUBBED OIL OF *CLOVES* ONTO MY GUMS ONCE, WHEN I HAD A *TOOTHACHE.* IT TASTES LIKE THAT.
FOR A *MOMENT.*
BUT THEN THERE *ARE* NO MOMENTS.
THE WORLD *ROARS,* AND I ROAR WITH IT.
I AM DEATH'S *GODHEAD!* I AM THE *WOLF!*
I GAVE A *BANQUET.* DO YOU SEE? I INVITED MY ENEMIES TO *EAT* WITH ME AND MAKE PEACE.
I FED THEM MY OWN *FLESH.* IMBUED WITH MY MIND AND MEANING. MY *POTENCY.*
TO KEEP IT *SAFE.* UNTIL I CAME TO TAKE IT *BACK.*
S-- SAFE FROM *WHAT?*
FROM *MYSELF,* LITTLE MADMAN. FOR I AM DISSOLUTION, AND IN THE TIME OF THE DAWNING, *NOTHING* WITHSTOOD MY POWER.
AND LO, IN THE TIME OF *TWILIGHT--*
--SO IT IS *AGAIN.*

LUCIFER, YOU MUST NOT *DO* THIS! THE ARCHON IS TRYING TO *SAVE* US ALL.
TO SHORE UP CREATION BEFORE IT FALLS *APART!*
I *KNOW.*
IT MIGHT EVEN *WORK,* UNDER OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES. BUT I LOOKED OVER DESTINY'S SHOULDER, AND I READ HOW THIS ENDS.
FENRIS IS GOING TO *YGGDRASIL.* ALL BETS ARE OFF.
MICHAEL, WAKE UP. I NEED TO *TALK* TO YOU.
MICHAEL!
ALL RIGHT.
THEN WE'LL DO THIS *ANOTHER* WAY.

WHY SHOULD THIS EVEN CONCERN YOU, MORNINGSTAR?
IT IS HEAVEN'S BUSINESS. LEAVE HEAVEN TO ANSWER IT.
DON'T BE DENSE, URIEL. YGGDRASIL IS ONE OF THE BEGINNING PLACES.
IF CREATION WERE A LENS, THAT WOULD BE ITS FOCAL POINT.
I WAS PREPARED TO SIT OUT THE END OF MY FATHER'S COSMOS--
YOU WERE PREPARED--?
--BUT THE CONFLAGRATION FENRIS INTENDS MIGHT SHAKE MY OWN REALM, TOO.
STAND AWAY FROM THE TOWER.
OR FLY AWAY.
THAT WOULD PROBABLY BE AN EVEN BETTER IDEA.

BAROOM

MICHAEL--
OH MY *GOD!*
SPEAK *QUICKLY,* LUCIFER. OR I CALL THIS HOST TO WITNESS--
--YOU WILL NOT SPEAK *AGAIN.*

WHY?
WHY WHAT?
THE SCARS.
WHAT ARE THEY FOR?
I WILL DIE SOON, BET JO'GIE.
I, THE TRICKSTER, WILL DIE. AND IN DEATH WEAVE MY GREATEST TRICK.
THIS IS MY MOCKERY OF DEATH. OF ENDING.
I DRESS MYSELF IN MY OWN BLOOD.
LET'S FUCK.

LOOK.
THIS IS *YGGDRASIL,* THE WORLD TREE. YOU'VE SEEN IT BEFORE.
ALTHOUGH IN TRUTH THAT WAS ONLY AN *IMAGE* ABONSAM PLACED IN YOUR MIND.
DO YOU KNOW THE *WAY* THERE, LITTLE MADMAN?
LITTLE MURDERER?
NO.
YOU GET THERE BY *LOSING* YOURSELF.
AND YOU OF ALL PEOPLE KNOW HOW EASY *THAT* CAN BE.

THE JOURNEY IS A SUBTRACTION. A SIMPLIFICATION. LIKE BEING BORN--
--IF YOUR MOTHER'S WOMB WERE WALLED WITH RESTLESS KNIVES.
THE FIRST BLADE MIGHT CUT AWAY YOUR HAND. THE SECOND YOUR COURAGE, OR THE MEMORY OF SOME LOVELY FACE.
YOU WILL NOT EVEN KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE LOST. THE ROAD TAKES WHAT IT TAKES.
BUT NOT FROM ME.
FOR YOU WILL BE MY CHARIOT, AND BEAR ME UNHARMED TO YGGDRASIL.
WHY ME? AND WHY WOULD I LET YOU DO THAT?
I CHOSE YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR DISEASE. YOU ARE WELL USED TO SURRENDERING PARTS OF YOURSELF.
THEREFORE YOU WILL BEAR US SWIFTLY. AND FOR THE REST--
YOU WILL SEE YOUR WIFE AND CHILD AGAIN, THERE.
IS THAT NOT WORTH A LITTLE PAIN?

SVARTALFHEIM.
NOW.
URIEL. ESTABLISH A *PERIMETER.*
DON'T LET ANYTHING *DISTURB* US.
IF THE JOURNEY ISN'T A *PHYSICAL* ONE, THEN WHY COME HERE?
BECAUSE THE TREE *EXPECTS* TO BE APPROACHED FROM THIS DIRECTION.
IT SHOULD MAKE THINGS A LITTLE *EASIER.*
OF COURSE, THAT'S A *RELATIVE* TERM.
THERE *IS* NO EASY WAY OF DOING THIS.

"at least, none that I've heard of."
CLOSE YOUR EYES.
YOU KNOW WHAT THE TREE LOOKS LIKE. YOU HAVE SMELLED THE AIR OF THAT PLACE.
TO WANT TO GO THERE IS ENOUGH.
COME AND GET ME, CHARLIE. COME AND GET YOUR SWEET SARAH.
COME AND FIND ME UNDER THE TREE, AND BRING ME HOME.
BUT THAT YOU CANNOT DO. NOT AS YOU ARE.
BREAK UP YOUR MIND AND SOUL. CAST IT FROM YOU, LIKE BREAD UPON THE WATERS.
GO TO HER.
KKHHHHHH!

IT COMES HARD.
IT
COMES
SLOW.
NOT THE TREE. I LOOK FOR THAT PLACE.
NOTHING.
I GROPE TOWARDS IT.
NOWHERE.
EXCELLENT!
YOU SEE, ABONSAM?
I SEE THE ROAD-- BUT NOT THE END OF IT.
BUT HER FACE IS THE KEY--
--THAT UNLOCKS ME--
AND
TEARS
ME
APART!

MY EARDRUMS BURST AND *MEMORIES* HEMORRHAGE OUT.
AND. OR.
I WALK *FORWARD,* AND PARTS OF ME STAY WHERE THEY *WERE.*
TEAR *HOLES* IN ME THAT SHOW DAYLIGHT CLEAR THROUGH.
THREE *ANGELS* FOLLOW ME. THE BRIGHT ONE BLEEDS *POWER.* THE DARK ONE BLEEDS *WILL.*
THE SMALLEST MERELY *WEEPS.* UNLESS THE FLUID THAT LEAKS FROM HER *EYES* IS SOMETHING ELSE.
AND THEIR STEPS *SLOW,* UNTIL I SEE THEM NO MORE.

--WHAT I LIKE *MOST* ABOUT YOU, CHARLIE. YOU NEVER--
TOWER.
OWER!
"YOU MUST REMEMBER THIS--"
YES!
OH YES.
YOU'RE DAMN *RIGHT* IT'S A BIG DEFICIT.
IN OREGON THEY'RE CLOSING THE *SCHOOLS* ONE DAY A--
(X+2)(X
WE CAN EXPRESS THIS AS X MINUS TWO.
X-2
Q
PUT UP OR SHUT UP, MAN.
--EXTREME EMOTIONAL *DISSOCIATION,* WHICH IS A SYMPTOM OF--

YOU'VE DONE *WELL,* MADMAN.
A FEW STEPS MORE. ONE *FINAL* EFFORT.
THERE. YOU CAN *REST,* NOW.
UNTIL YOU'RE NEEDED *AGAIN.*
NO! NO!
WHERE *ARE* THEY? WHERE ARE--?
I DON'T REMEMBER THEIR *NAMES,* BUT WHERE ARE THEY? YOU SAID THEY'D *BE* HERE!

ALL THAT YOU WANT IS HERE IN THIS *BAG* I CARRY.
ALL YOU WERE TOLD IS *TRUE.* REJOICE.
BUT YOU SAID-- THEY'D BE *WAITING* FOR ME HERE. YOU SAID--
I SAID YOU'D *SEE* THEM AGAIN, LITTLE MADMAN.
AND SO YOU WILL. SO YOU *WILL.*
FENRIS. YOU SAW THE *ANGELS,* CLOSE BEHIND US?
I SAW THEM.
ONE BEHIND AND ONE IN *FRONT* WOULD BE-- INTERESTING.
THEY'LL COME TOO LATE. TOO *WEAK* FROM THE JOURNEY.
BECAUSE THEY *WALKED* WHERE WE RODE. AND IF NOT--
AYE. THEN THERE IS THE *TRICK.*
AS WE *AGREED.*

I AM ABONSAM.
MY EYE IS THE HAWK'S EYE. MY HAND STRIKES LIKE A SNAKE.
FROM UNDER YOUR HAND, UNDER YOUR HAMMER I TOOK THEM AWAY.
LEFT DOLLS OF CLAY THAT THOUGHT THEMSELVES ALIVE.
BUT-- WHY DO I LOVE THEM SO MUCH? WHO ARE THEY?
YOUR WIFE. AND YOUR SON.
IN YOUR MADNESS YOU TRIED TO KILL THEM.
BUT ABONSAM SAVED THEM.
I-- THANK YOU! THANK YOU!
NAY, YOU'VE HELPED US, TOO.
IN TRUTH, THE SCALES ARE ALMOST EVEN.
I'VE BUT ONE FURTHER FAVOR TO ASK OF YOU.
BUT GATHER YOUR STRENGTH FIRST. THE SWORD IS HEAVY.

"AND WE'VE A WHILE YET BEFORE THE ANGELS JOIN US."
UFFF!
LUCIFER, I CAN'T *SEE!*
YOU'LL HAVE TO *HELP* ME.
YOU'LL HAVE TO TELL ME WHAT TO DO--

MW Kaluta
2004

YGGRADSIL, THE WORLD TREE. ONE OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF CREATION.
I COULDN'T EVEN SPEAK.
TAKE THE *SWORD*--
--AND *KILL* THEM BOTH.
THE *WEIGHT* OF THAT THING IN MY HANDS-- IT SEEMED TO FILL THE WHOLE *WORLD*.
YOU DID IT ONCE *BEFORE*. AND THAT TIME WAS *MEANT* TO BE THEIR DEATH.
DO IT AGAIN NOW. OR THEY WILL SUFFER FAR *WORSE* AT MY HANDS.
WHY ARE YOU *DOING* THIS TO US? I-- I CAN'T...
BECAUSE THE MURDER OF KIN IS *FYRIR HAFT*-- THE FIRST AND *WORST* OF CRIMES.
THE *BREACH* THROUGH WHICH NATURE BLEEDS.
STRIKE FROM *HERE*.
THE BLOOD OF YOUR WIFE AND SON MUST WATER THE *ROOTS* OF THE TREE.
TO SET THE SEAL UPON THE ENDING OF THE WORLDS.

FENRIS. THE *ANGELS* THAT WE SAW-- THEY'RE HERE.
YES. I TASTE THEIR SWEAT, AND THEIR *BLOOD.*
A GREAT *DEAL* OF BLOOD. THE JOURNEY WAS *HARD* ON THEM.
CHANGE THE MADMAN'S *MIND,* BET JO'GIE. YOU CAN *BREAK* IT AGAIN IN THE PROCESS, IF THAT HELPS. ABONSAM, COME.
WHY *HIM,* AND NOT ME?
BECAUSE HE ATE AT MY *TABLE* ONCE. LONG AGO, NOW.
RED MEAT, AND THICK, *SOUR* WINE.
MY *FLESH,* AND MY BLOOD. IN *PREPARATION* FOR THIS DAY.
COME ON, SWEETHEART. YOU'VE GOT *WORK* TO DO.

THE WOLF BENEATH THE TREE

PART 4 OF 4

MIKE CAREY
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Based on characters created by
GAIMAN, KIETH and DRINGENBERG

NEARBY.
LUCIFER! PLEASE! I KNOW YOU'RE *INJURED.* REALLY BADLY.
BUT YOU'VE *GOT* TO WAKE UP!
I CAN'T *DO* THIS ON MY OWN. I DON'T KNOW IF WE'VE REACHED THE *TREE.*
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO UNLESS YOU *TELL* ME.
YOUR FRIENDS ARE HURT. CAN *WE* DO AUGHT TO HELP?
WHO'S THERE?
WHO *ARE* YOU?
WE ARE *PILGRIMS,* ON OUR WAY TO YGGDRASIL. I AM *SCEORFAN.*
AND THIS MAN HERE IS MY FRIEND, THE HOLY MAN, BERUMIR.
I CAN'T SEE *ANYTHING.*
I'M *BLIND.*

THIS IS AN *ANGEL.* HE LOOKS SCORED AND CORED, SINKING TOWARDS HIS *DEATH.* BUT YONDER FOUNTAIN--
ITS WATERS HAVE *MEDICINAL* EFFECTS.
CAN YOU *BRING* SOME? PLEASE? HE *MUSTN'T* DIE.
IT'S VERY *IMPORTANT* THAT WE REACH THE TREE.
AYE, THEN. I'LL FETCH IT IN MY *HANDS.* WAIT HERE.
PLEASE. BE AS QUICK AS YOU *CAN.*
DOUBT ME *NOT.*
SKLLLCHH

HELLO? SCEORFAN? WHAT WAS THAT *SOUND?*
NOTHING.
IT WAS-- NOTHING.
HERE. I *HAVE* THE WATER.
CUP YOUR *HANDS.*
IT-- IT'S *WARM.* IT FEELS LIKE--
QUICKLY. LET IT TRICKLE-- INTO HIS MOUTH--
--ERE HE *DIE* OF HIS WOUNDS.

COF! COF! COF!
LUCIFER! I THINK WE'RE ALMOST *THERE.*
WE'VE JUST GOT TO--
...

DON'T YOU THINK I'M *BEAUTIFUL,* CHARLIE?
DON'T YOU *WANT* ME?
KEEP *AWAY* FROM ME.
OR I SWEAR I'LL *KILL* YOU.
WITH *THIS* SWORD YOU MIGHT EVEN MANAGE IT.
BUT BREATHE *IN,* CHARLIE.
THAT SMELL IS ME. MY *HEAT*-- MY LOVE FOR YOU.
I AM BET JO'GIE ETTA HI EE. THE WOMAN WHO IS BOTH BEAUTIFUL AND *TERRIBLE.*
OH GOD. OH GOD.
KILL YOUR *WIFE,* AND YOUR *SON*--
AND THEIR BODIES WILL BE THE *BED* WE COUPLE ON.

I WAS SICK ONCE.
I WAS SICK FOR A LONG TIME. I WAS ON MEDICATION.
AND WHEN I DIDN'T TAKE THE MEDS, I'D GET CONFUSED.
LIKE I DIDN'T ALWAYS KNOW WHAT WAS INSIDE MY HEAD AND WHAT WAS OUTSIDE IT. THAT WAS HOW I FELT RIGHT THEN.
I LOOKED DOWN AT SARAH'S FACE. SO BEAUTIFUL.
BUT I BREATHED IN AGAIN. ANOTHER MOUTHFUL OF HER.
AND I STIRRED AND STIFFENED WITH A TERRIBLE NEED.
UP TO THE HILT, CHARLIE. ALL THE WAY IN, SMOOTH AS SILK.
WON'T THAT FEEL GOOD? WON'T THAT FEEL RIGHT?
OH YES!
GOD, YES!

Hhhhkkkkkk!
L-- LUCIFER?
Hhhhhkkkk!
BROTHER?
ARE YOU *MAD?*
LEAVE ELAINE BE, MORNINGSTAR. I *WARN* YOU--
MORNINGSTAR?
I am *FENRIS.*
I am the *WOLF!*

FENRIS-- TELL THE *STORY* OF THIS, WHEN I AM DEAD.
OF HOW I *MADE* THIS TRICK.
WHAT? THAT YOU JOINED THE *BANQUET* OF MY ENEMIES, WHEN I PARCELED MYSELF OUT LIKE *BREAD?*
THAT YOU TOOK MY *ESSENCE* INTO YOURSELF-- NOT UNKNOWING, AS THEY DID, BUT *WILLINGLY.*
SO THAT YOUR BLOOD, NOW *PREGNANT* WITH MY THOUGHTS, COULD INFECT LORD LUCIFER?
I'LL TELL IT IF I *REMEMBER* IT.
BROTHER--
--YOU ARE NOT *YOURSELF.*
SO I AM *SORRY* FOR THIS.

OH.
PRETTY!
NOT REAL! NOT REAL!
BUT JUST IN CASE--
AAAHHRRR!
SKLUT
SKLUT
SKLUT

IT IS NOT *YOU* WHO SPEAKS HERE, LUCIFER.
IT IS NOT YOU WHO ACTS.
YOU MUST *FIGHT* THIS. BECOME YOURSELF AGAIN.
OR OUR WORK AND OUR PAIN IN REACHING THIS PLACE ARE FOR NOTHING-- AND CREATION WILL *FALL*.
EXCELLENT.

MORNINGSTAR-- BROTHER-- I DON'T WANT TO *KILL* YOU--
KILL *ME?* YOUR WINGS ARE *BROKEN,* ANGEL.
YOUR STRENGTH IS *FAILING.*
I am the *FURNACE* in which you will be unmade.
I am your *DEATH.*
YOU WILL BE *ALL* OUR DEATHS. THIS IS *YOUR* CHOOSING--

CHARLIE!
SARAH.
CHARLIE, WHAT'S *HAPPENING?*
IT'S ALL RIGHT, SARAH. YOU HAD A BAD *DREAM.*
WE-- WE *ALL* HAD A BAD DREAM. BUT NOW IT'S OKAY.
AH, BUT THERE'S THE *RUB,* LITTLE MADMAN.
AND THERE'S THE *PITY.*
THE *DREAM* IS YOUR LIVES.
FROM WHICH YOU WILL AWAKEN INTO A DREAM OF *NOTHING.*

SEE-- THE ROOTS OF THE TREE HAVE BEEN *WATERED* VERY GENEROUSLY.
BROTHER KILLING BROTHER IS EVERY *BIT* AS GOOD AS HUSBAND KILLING WIFE, OR FATHER *SON.*
I WON'T LET YOU *HURT* THEM.
THEY'RE *IRRELEVANT* NOW. BUT YOU'RE NOT. YOU WERE THE *CHARIOT* THAT BROUGHT ME HERE.
NOW YOU'RE THE *ANCHOR* THAT HOLDS ME.
LO. I *CAST* OFF--
CHARLIEEE!
--AND I AM *GONE.*
DO NOT *MOURN* HIM, WOMAN.
IN THIS TIME OF ENDINGS, HE IS MERELY GONE A LITTLE WAY *BEFORE.*
THINGS FALL *APART.*
THE *CENTRE* CANNOT HOLD.
NOTHING CAN STOP IT NOW.

MICHAEL--
IT IS-- TOO *LATE,* BROTHER.
WE WERE-- ANTICIPATED-- AND WE HAVE *LOST.*
I BELIEVE-- I AM *DYING.*
That raises problems of its *own,* doesn't it?
BRING HER. BRING *ELAINE.*
I'M *HERE,* FATHER.

I-- I'LL *STAY* WITH YOU, IF YOU WANT ME TO. UNTIL--
NO. *LISTEN* TO ME.
WHILE I CAN STILL *SPEAK.*
THERE IS A *POWER* WITHIN ME. THE *DUNAMIS DEMIURGOS.* GOD'S POWER.
WHEN I DIE, IT WILL POUR *OUT* OF ME AND OVERWHELM EVERYTHING THAT *EXISTS.*
BUT--EVERYTHING'S GOING TO FALL APART NOW *ANYWAY.*
IN *DAYS,* YES. OR WEEKS.
I'M DYING *NOW,* ELAINE. YOU HAVE TO *TAKE* THE POWER FROM ME.
TAKE IT-- TAKE IT *FROM* YOU?
SHE'S NOT *STRONG* ENOUGH. IT WILL *DESTROY* HER.
I CAN THINK OF NO OTHER WAY. EXCHANGE *FORGIVENESS* WITH ME, LUCIFER.
I AM SORRY THAT IT *CAME* TO THIS.
YOU DON'T *NEED* MY FORGIVENESS.
IT WAS *MY* MISTAKE THAT BROUGHT US HERE.

YOU WILL HAVE TO BE BOTH CONDUIT AND *DAM*, ELAINE.
TO *RECEIVE* THE FLOOD, AND THEN TO PEN IT IN, SO THAT IT FINDS ITS *LEVEL* WITHIN YOU.
I DON'T KNOW *HOW*. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO *DO* THAT.
YOU GOTTA GET US *OUT* OF HERE, MISTER.
MY SON CAN'T TAKE MUCH *MORE* OF THIS.
AHUH AHUH AHUH
THE WAYS OUT OF HERE ARE ALMOST AS HARD AS THE WAYS *IN*.
JUST WAIT A WHILE *LONGER*. IT MAY ALL BECOME *ACADEMIC* IN A MOMENT OR TWO.
IF YOU *SURVIVE* THIS, YOU WILL HAVE MANY RESPONSIBILITIES.
BUT I THINK YOU WILL *RISE* TO THEM. I THINK THERE ARE FEW THINGS THAT *YOU* CANNOT DO.
FATHER. OH GOD, I'M SORRY I NEVER *CAME* TO YOU. NEVER TRIED TO TALK--
IT WOULD HAVE DONE NO *GOOD*. I WAS *PROUD*, AND STUBBORN.
I COULD HAVE SOUGHT *YOU* OUT. I COULD HAVE--
AAAHHRRR!

AND THE WORLD WENT AWAY. AND SARAH. AND BOBBY.
I REACHED OUT TO THEM-- TO TELL THEM I WAS OKAY-- BUT MY HAND TOUCHED RED-BROWN EARTH.
NO, NOT EARTH. DUST. DUST SO DRY YOU'D SWEAR IT HAD *NEVER* DRUNK.
AND I WANTED TO SAY, NO. I'M NOT DONE YET. I'VE GOT TO MAKE SURE THEY'RE *SAFE*.
NO.
IT'S TOO LATE FOR REGRETS.
THE LIVING MUST DO WITHOUT YOU NOW.
MY MASTER SET ME HERE.
HE BADE ME SPEAK THESE WORDS TO ALL WHO COME.

WELCOME TO YOUR DEATH--
--AND OUR ARMY.
The End

MW Kaluta 2004

SO THERE'S A *WHEEL*. ABOUT FOUR HUNDRED, FIVE HUNDRED FEET ACROSS THE ***MIDDLE***.
AND-- STOP ME IF I'M GETTING TOO TECHNICAL-- THE WHEEL TURNS A SCREW.
THIS IS IN *GEHENNA*. HELL CENTRAL.
YOU SLACK OFF, THEY'VE GOT AN *INCENTIVE* SCHEME. GUARANTEED TO *RE-MOTIVATE* YOU.
THE GROUND IS BROKEN *GLASS*-- SHARP AS A FUCKING RAZOR.
AND SINCE YOU'RE *CHAINED* TO YOUR POST, FALLING DOWN ON THE JOB IS GONNA GET YOU *JULIENNED*. NOT RECOMMENDED.
THE SCREW IS A *MILL*-- LIKE A PEPPER MILL.
SO YOU'RE SCREWING A WHOLE BUNCH OF *OTHER* GUYS WHO'RE STUCK IN THERE. ECONOMY OF *EFFORT*, SEE?
AND ONCE EVERY *THOUSAND* YEARS--
--EVERYONE GETS TO CHANGE *PLACES*.

HERE.
DRINK.

YOU'VE GOTTA SEE THIS IN *CONTEXT,* RIGHT?
BRING *HIM!*
BRING HIM TO *ME!*
THESE GUYS SET A LOT OF ***STORE*** BY ROUTINE.
AND IN THEIR CASE, IT'S NOT A ***ROUTINE*** UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN DOING IT FOR A HUNDRED ***MILLENNIA*** OR SO.
WHEN SOMEONE STEPS OUT OF *LINE*--
--YOU JUST *KNOW* THERE'S GONNA BE TROUBLE.

THE EIGHTH SIN

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BASED ON CHARACTERS CREATED BY GAIMAN, KIETH AND DRINGENBERG

WHY DID NOBODY TELL ME ABOUT THIS *BEFORE?*
AND WHY HAVE YOU *ALLOWED* IT TO HAPPEN?
IT WAS AN ISOLATED *INCIDENT,* REMIEL. OF NO SIGNIFICANCE, BEYOND--
FIVE ISOLATED INCIDENTS. IN FIVE DIFFERENT *REGIONS* OF HELL.
WHICH I RULE-- I NEED HARDLY REMIND YOU-- IN *HEAVEN'S* NAME.
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHAT WE ARE *DOING* HERE?
HOW THE FATE OF THESE SOULS *DEPENDS* ON OUR HOLDING FAST TO THEIR JUST PUNISHMENT?
SOMEONE IS PREACHING A *DIFFERENT* DOCTRINE.
DIDN'T YOU *KNOW?*

PREACHING, LADY LYS?
IN HELL?
SHE MEANS THE RISEN ONE. HE'S JUST A MYTH.
BUT IF HE WERE REAL-- WHAT WOULD HIS MESSAGE BE?
I WOULDN'T KNOW.
IF ANYONE IN AMSATH SPEAKS HIS NAME, I DISMEMBER THEM.
HE SAYS THAT NOTHING IS ETERNAL. THAT DAMNED AND DEMON ALIKE SHOULD SEEK THEIR FATE IN CHANGE--
--AS GOD AND LUCIFER HAVE ALREADY DONE.
I SHOULD LIKE TO SPEAK WITH THIS PREACHER, ON MATTERS DOCTRINAL.
BRING HIM TO ME, AND I WILL BE GENEROUS. PROFLIGATELY GENEROUS.
WELL, I WAS GONNA HAVE TO LOOK UP SOME OF THE BIG WORDS--
--BUT I GUESS I GOT THE GIST.
YOU KNOW, IF I DIDN'T EXIST--
--SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TO INVENT ME.

DO ME THE COURTESY OF NOT *PRETENDING* IGNORANCE.
WE ARE THREATENED WITH *CRISIS,* AND YOUR RESPONSE IS TO WEED THE HERBACEOUS *BORDERS.*
WELL, IT DOESN'T *ABSOLVE* YOU DUMA.
IT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN WASH YOUR *HANDS.*

YOU NEVER DO *ANYTHING*. SO I HAVE TO DO IT ALL!
I HAVE TO MAKE THE *HARD* CHOICES. I HAVE TO BE *CRUEL*, SO THAT YOU CAN STAY CLEAN!
YAHWEH HAS *ABANDONED* US!
WHAT *ARE* WE, THEN? WHAT *ARE* WE WITHOUT *HIM?*
A MARIGOLD. THAT SYMBOLIZES *MOURNING*, DOES IT NOT?
WELL CERTES, WE HAVE *MUCH* TO MOURN.
I'M SORRY I *DISTURBED* YOU, BROTHER.
I KNOW HOW *PRECIOUS* YOUR TIME IS.

BEHOLD, I BREAK THIS *BREAD* AND PASS IT AMONG YOU.
TASTE IT, AND CONSIDER.
WHEN WE EAT, WE TAKE INTO OURSELVES THAT WHICH IS NOT US.
THEN BY THE ACTION OF OUR STOMACH AND OUR BOWELS WE *ASSIMILATE* IT, SO THAT IT BECOMES A *PART* OF US.
IN THE SAME WAY, THIS *HELL* WHERE WE LIVE IS A *STOMACH*--
--THAT *DIGESTS* US AND MAKES US OVER INTO ITS OWN IMAGE.
THIS IS A SINGLE *INSTANCE* OF A UNIVERSAL LAW. FROM MOMENT TO MOMENT, WE CHANGE. WE *BECOME.*
IF WE ARE ANYTHING AT ALL, WE *ARE* THAT BECOMING.
LIKE *LUCIFER,* WHO FELL FROM HEAVEN TO HELL, AND THEN ROSE AGAIN.
TO SHOW US THE *WAY.* TO SHOW US HOW *SHORT* ETERNITY IS.

WHAT WOULD *YOU* KNOW OF LUCIFER? YOU NEVER FOUGHT WITH HIM. ***FELL*** WITH HIM.
HE WAS NEVER YOUR ***COMMANDER***, OR YOUR BROTHER, CHRISTOPHER RUDD.
WHEN HE DUELED WITH ***AMENADIEL*** OF THE THRONES, I WAS ALL THE ARMY HE ***HAD***.
I CARRIED HIS ***HEART*** IN MY HANDS.
YOU -- YOU WERE WITH HIM ***THEN?***
I ***SAVED*** HIM THEN. I DELIVERED HIS ENEMY INTO HIS ***POWER***.
THE MORNINGSTAR IS MY ***PATRON***, AND MY FRIEND.
THEN I LAY DOWN MY ***ARMS*** AT YOUR FETT. AND MY ***LIFE***, TOO, IF YOU WISH IT.
I AM ***YOURS***. WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO?
EAT.
AND BELIEVE.
AND BE ***RENEWED***.

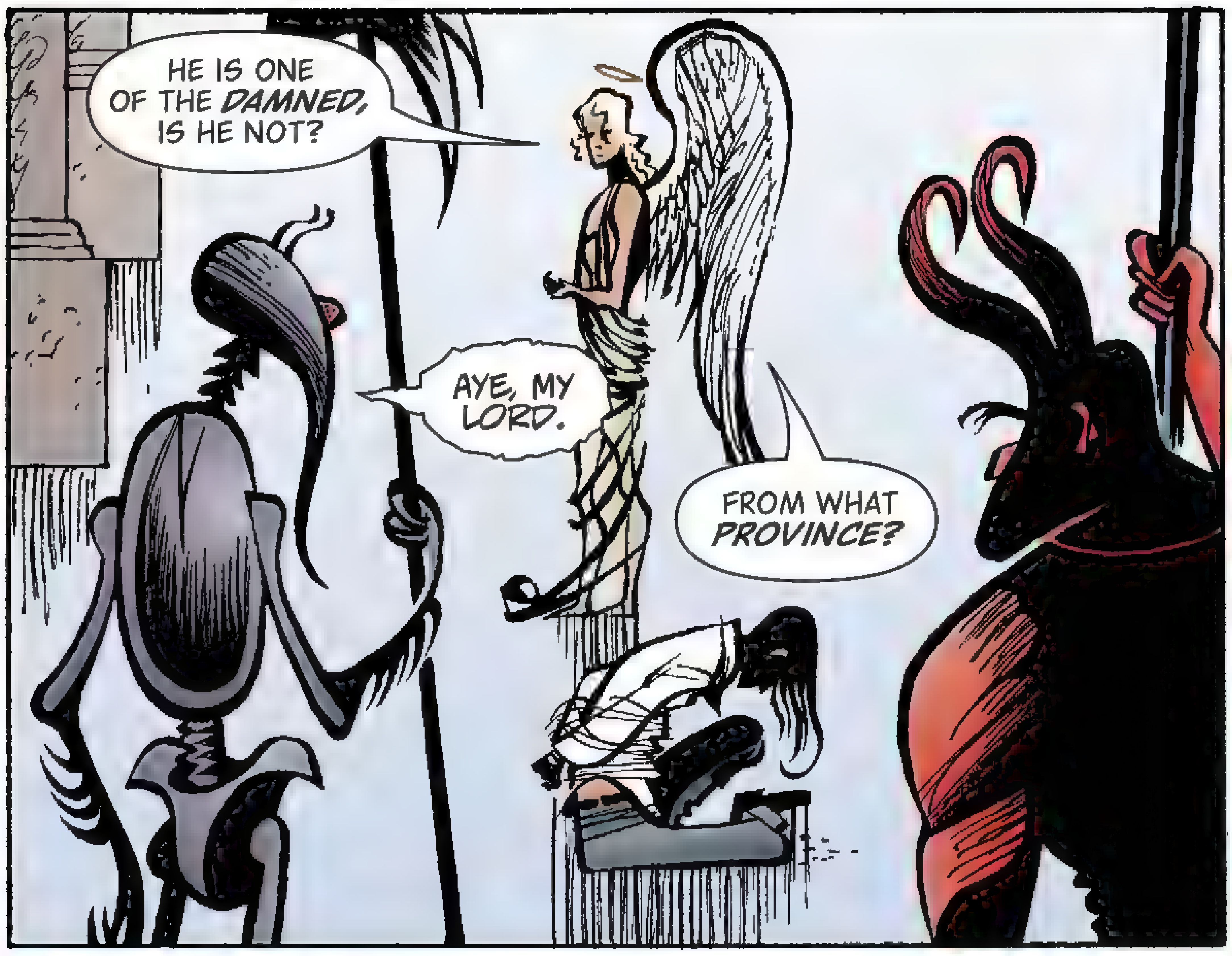
TEACHER, THERE IS A **WOMAN** WHO WOULD SPEAK WITH YOU.
LET HER **COME,** TROHAIN.
BUT FOR A **MOMENT,** ONLY. I'LL SPEAK AGAIN WHILE MY WORDS ARE STILL IN THEIR **MINDS.**
SHE SAYS YOUR CONVERSE MUST BE **PRIVATE,** TEACHER.
LIKE THE **COMMUNION** YOU GAVE HER IN LORD ARUX'S HOUSE, THE NIGHT IT **BURNED.**
TELL THE OTHERS TO **WAIT.**
IF THEY GROW **RESTLESS,** LEAD THEM IN A SONG.

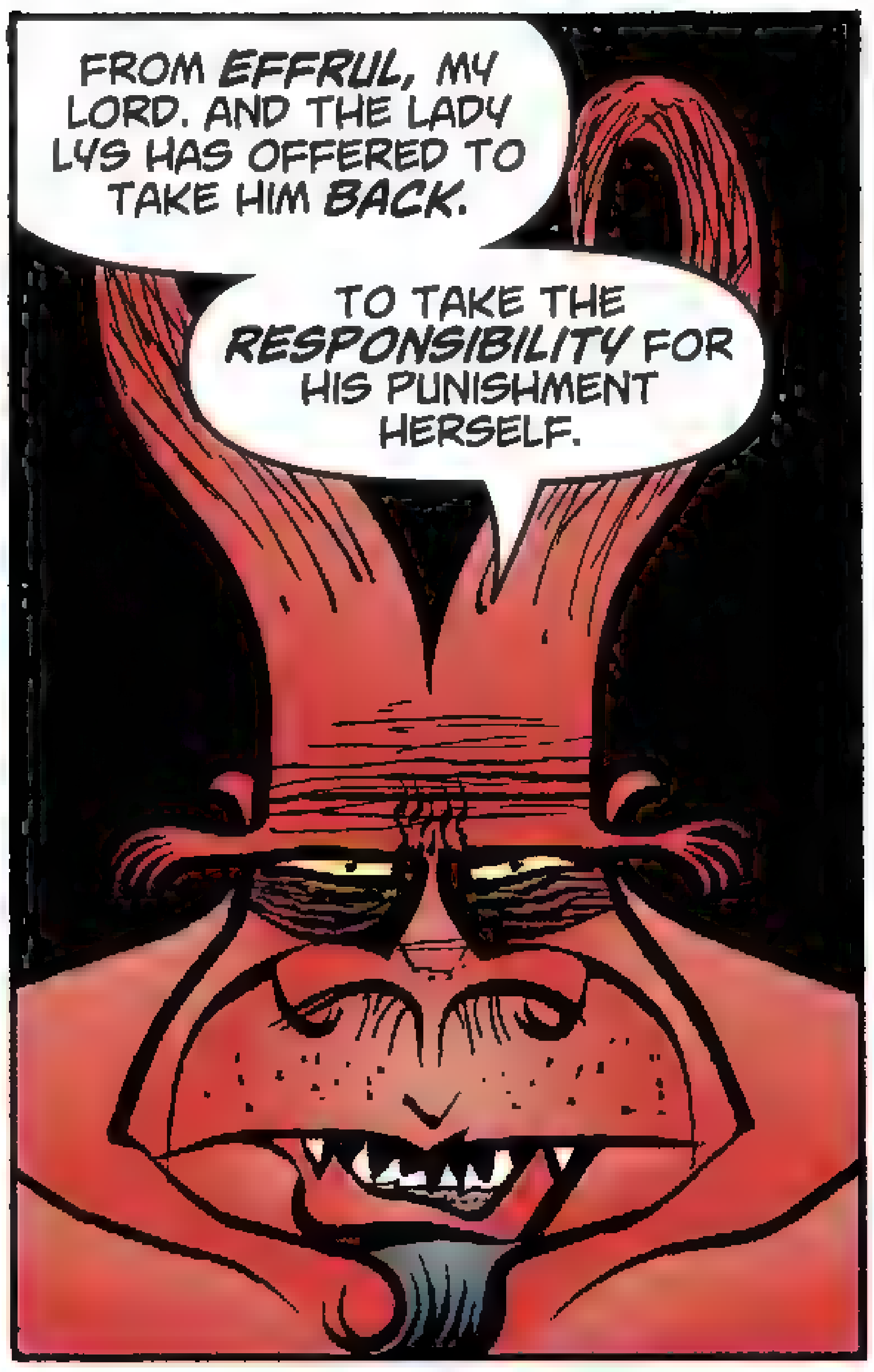
LYS.
MILORD RUDD.
HOW *DOES* YOUR HONOR FOR THIS MANY A DAY?
IF YOU MEANT THE QUESTION *SERIOUSLY,* I'M WELL. THANK YOU.
AND *YOURSELF?*
I WAX. I *FLOURISH.* WHEN YOU BETRAYED MY *FATHER,* YOU DID ME A GREAT SERVICE.
I HAVE DONE YOU NOTHING BUT *HARM.* BECAUSE BOTH MY LOVE AND MY *HATE* FOR YOU WERE SELFISH.
AND MY *PUNISHMENT* IS TO LOVE YOU STILL. WITHOUT *HOPE.*
AH, BUT TO RUT WITH A *DEMON*-- WOULD THAT NOT STEEP YOUR SOUL IN MORTAL *SIN* AGAIN?
THERE *IS* NO MORTAL SIN.
THERE ARE ONLY *SOULS,* LOST IN A MAZE THAT SOMEONE *ELSE* HAS MADE FOR THEM.
THEN LET'S WALK DOWN BY THE *RIVER,* CHRISTOPHER, WHERE WE WON'T BE SEEN--
AND YOU CAN UNDO *ME* BEFORE YOU UNDO *HELL.*
LYS--
FLUTTER FLUTTER *FLUTTER.*
RUSTLE *RUSTLE.*
LOUD *THROAT-CLEARING* NOISE.

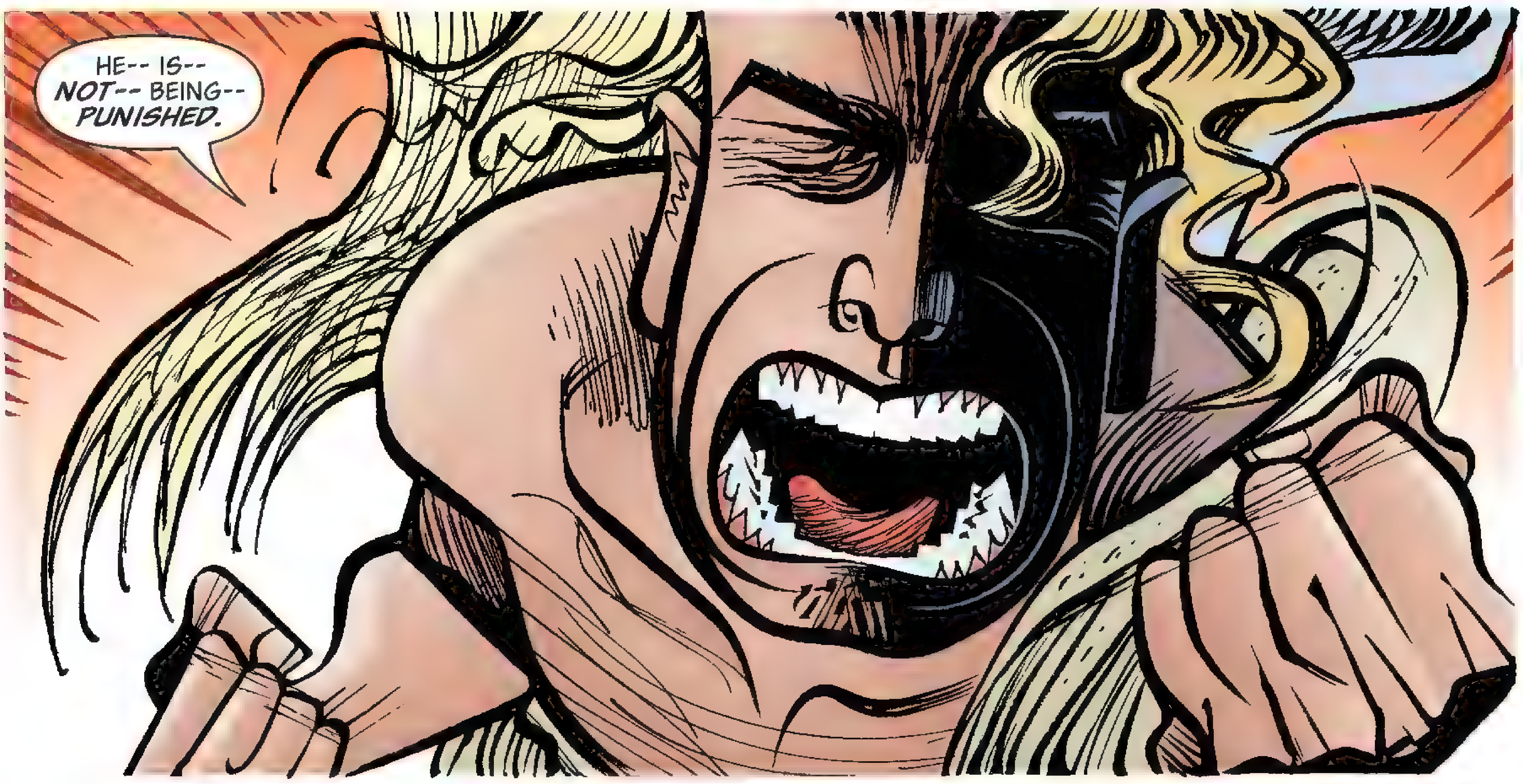
GAUDIUM.
OH GOOD, YOU CAN SEE ME.
I WAS SCARED SHE MIGHT'VE PUT YOUR EYES OUT WITH THOSE THINGS.
THE BIG GUY OWES YOU A FAVOR, AND I GUESS I'M IT. READ IT AND WEEP, PAL.
HER LADYSHIP JUST TOOK A BRIEFING FROM SOME GUYS WITH FEATHERS.
I'M SURROUNDED BY MY FOLLOWERS HERE, LADY.
DID YOU TRULY THINK YOU COULD TAKE ME OUT FROM AMONG THEM?
AH, IT IS MY PRIDE, CHRISTOPHER. I LOVE YOU TOO, YOU SEE.
BUT MY PRIDE WILL NEVER ALLOW ME TO TAKE YOU--
--EXCEPT FROM ON TOP.

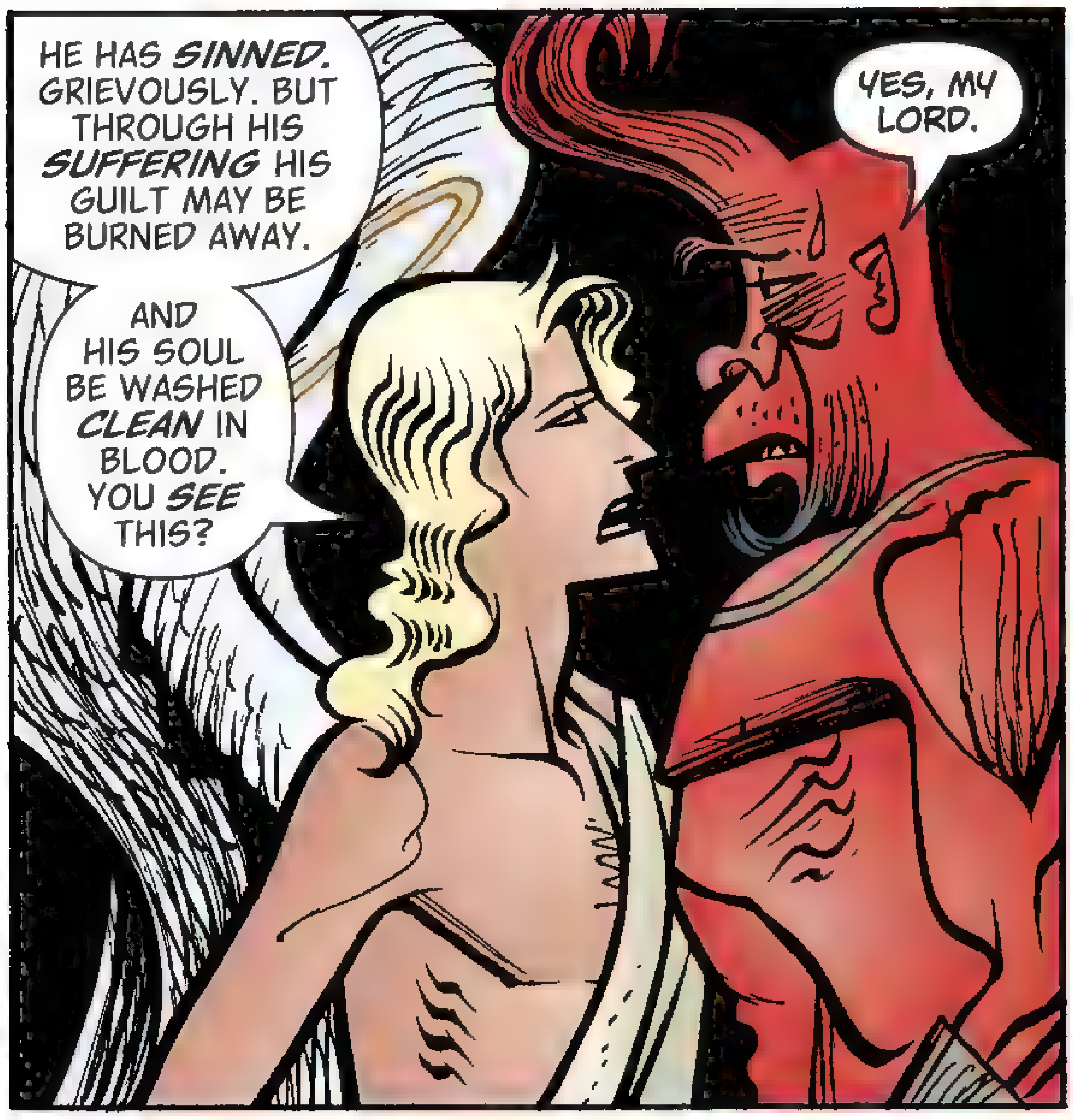
AND THE *CHERUB,* LADYSHIP?
THE CHERUB'S GONNA FOLD YOU INTO A PAPER *KITE,* YOU PIECE OF--GNNNNRRRRR! YOU'RE GONNA WEEP *BLOOD* FOR THIS! YOU'RE GONNA--
STUFF HIM AND *MOUNT* HIM. THERE'S PROBABLY A SPACE IN THE *PARLOR.*

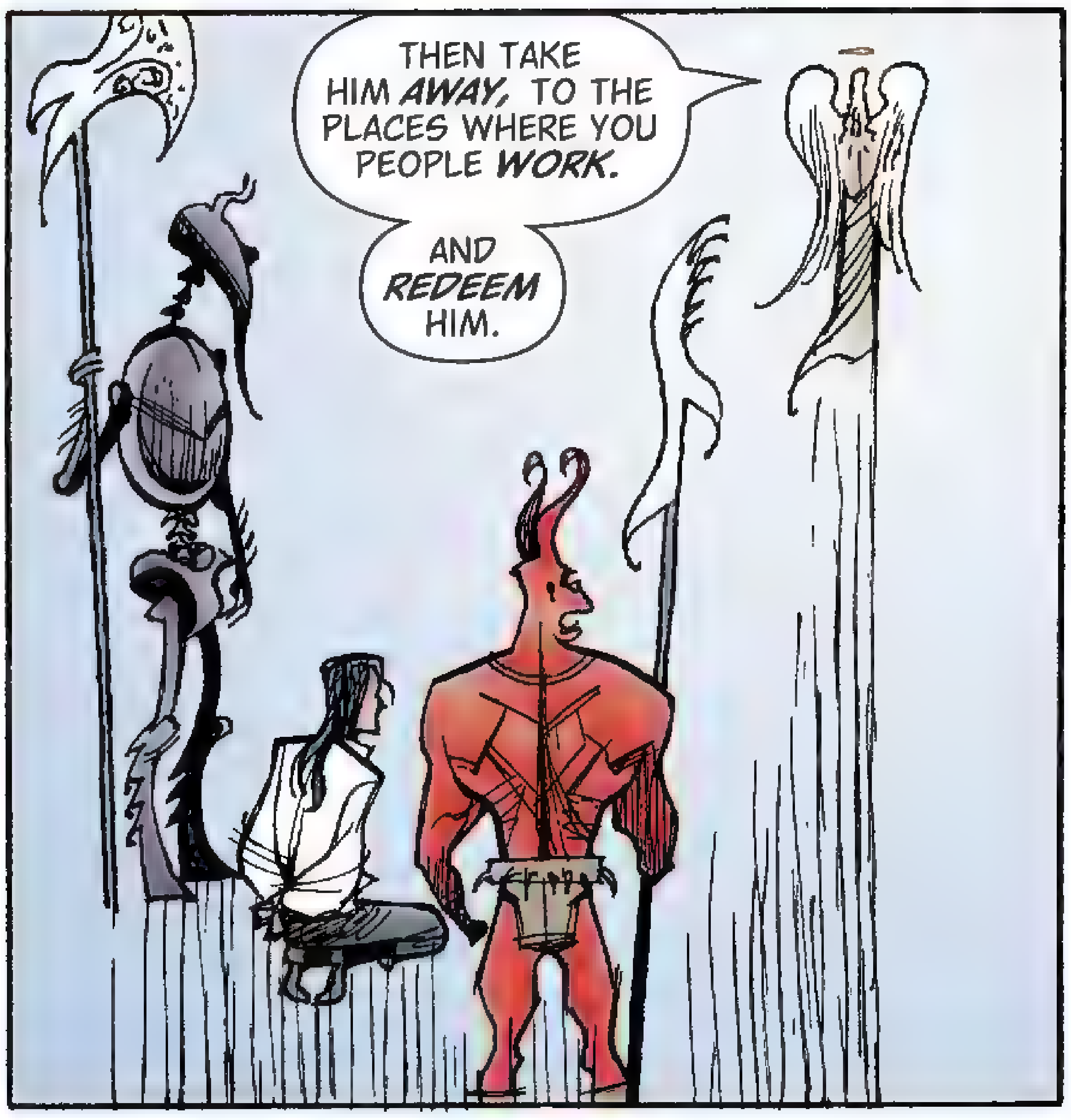
"PAIN IS A *LADDER,* CHRISTOPHER RUDD, BY WHICH A PILGRIM SOUL MAY ASCEND TO *HEAVEN."*
"WHEN YOU *INTERRUPT* THAT PROCESS, YOU SET YOURSELF AGAINST THE WILL OF *GOD."*
GOD IS *DEAD.*
A *COMMON* MISCONCEPTION. HE IS GONE, BUT HE WILL *RETURN.*
IN THE MEANTIME, WE EMBODY HIS *PLAN* AND HIS *AUTHORITY.*
THROUGH US, HIS GREAT *WORK* GOES ON.
THROUGH US, HIS *LOVE* ENFOLDS EVEN THOSE WHO TRY HARDEST TO REJECT IT.
NO. THE *TORTURE* YOU INFLICT HAS BECOME AN END IN ITSELF, REMIEL.
AND YOUR EXCESSES WILL BECOME *WORSE* AS YOUR FEAR GROWS. BECAUSE YOU'RE *ALONE* NOW, AND YOU'RE AFRAID THAT--
SMACK
YOU ARE *MISTAKEN.*
YOU SPEAK ABOUT THINGS *FAR* BEYOND YOUR UNDERSTANDING.


HE IS ONE OF THE *DAMNED*, IS HE NOT?
AYE, MY LORD.
FROM WHAT *PROVINCE?*


FROM *EFFRUL*, MY LORD. AND THE LADY LYS HAS OFFERED TO TAKE HIM *BACK*.
TO TAKE THE *RESPONSIBILITY* FOR HIS PUNISHMENT HERSELF.


HE-- IS-- *NOT*-- BEING-- *PUNISHED*.


HE HAS *SINNED*. GRIEVOUSLY. BUT THROUGH HIS *SUFFERING* HIS GUILT MAY BE BURNED AWAY.
AND HIS SOUL BE WASHED *CLEAN* IN BLOOD. YOU *SEE* THIS?
YES, MY LORD.


THEN TAKE HIM *AWAY*, TO THE PLACES WHERE YOU PEOPLE *WORK*.
AND *REDEEM* HIM.

IF THIS WERE A MOVIE, I THINK BY NOW WE'D HAVE REACHED THE END OF THE SECOND ACT.
HOW DO I WHAT?
I SAID, HOW DO YOU STUFF A CHERUB?
TAP TAP
I MEAN, DO YOU HAVE TO PULL ALL THE INNARDS OUT, OR DO YOU JUST--?
I DON'T KNOW. BUT PLEASE-- DO IT SOMEWHERE ELSE.
SSSSSS
THE PART WHERE EVERYTHING SEEMS MAXIMALLY FUCKED UP.
ONLY IT ISN'T, BECAUSE OUR CHARISMATIC HERO HAS GOT A PLAN.
SSSSSS
WELL, COULD YOU LEND ME SOME TOOLS?
A SPATULA, OR--
...
SSSSSSSSS
AAAURGH!
BUT BECAUSE I'M MORE CHARISMATIC THAN MOST, I FIGURE IT'S OKAY IF I JUST MAKE IT UP AS I GO ALONG.
TO SWITCH METAPHORS, IT WAS THE BOTTOM OF THE NINTH AND THE BASES WERE TOWERING INFERNOS. WHO'S GONNA STEP UP TO THE PLATE?
WHO ELSE?

I SEE.
I SEE.

THE SOUL IS *ETERNAL,* CHRISTOPHER RUDD. BUT ITS STRANDS MAY BE *UNPICKED* AND SEPARATED.
THAT IS THE DEATH THAT WAITS *BEHIND* DEATH. THE DEATH WITH NO FURTHER *SHORE.*
TELL YOUR FOLLOWERS THAT YOU WERE *WRONG.* EXPLAIN TO THEM THE *NECESSITY* FOR HELL'S EXISTENCE.
OR THIS ENDLESS *DYING* WILL BE YOUR FATE.
I WAS WRONG IN ONE RESPECT *ONLY.* I TOLD THE LADY *LYS* THAT THERE WAS NO SIN.
BUT THERE *IS.*
HELL *ITSELF* IS A SIN.
YOU WILL NOT BE *FORGIVEN* FOR IT.
VERY WELL.
YOUR LAST SERMON SHALL BE *WITHOUT* WORDS.

THE RULE OF HEAVEN IS THE RULE OF *LAW,* AND *REASON.*
YOU *WILL* LISTEN TO REASON.
HERE. NOW. BY *RIGHT* AND ORDINANCE DIVINE, I PASS *SENTENCE* ON YOUR TEACHER.
HIS SOUL I WILL *DIVIDE* INTO AS MANY PIECES AS HE HAS DISCIPLES. AND I WILL *CAST* THE PIECES FROM THE ROOF OF THIS TOWER.
THAT YOU MAY HEAR A NEW *GOSPEL* IN THE SHRIEKING OF THE WIND--
--AND A *SERMON* IN THE THUNDER.

AAAHHRRR!
NO.

DUMA? WHAT--?
YOU ARE RIGHT, MY BROTHER.
THIS THING IS TOO HARD. THIS CUP MUST PASS FROM YOU.
BUT-- YOU HAVE SPOKEN! BEFORE THESE FALLEN CREATURES YOU HAVE BROKEN FAITH WITH YOUR CREATOR.
IT IS NOT BROKEN.
ONLY MOVED, FROM ONE QUARTER INTO ANOTHER.
I AM THE ELDER HERE, REMIEL. I AM THE BEARER OF THE KEY.
THE WEIGHT OF THIS VERDICT FALLS ON ME ALONE.
RULE US, CHRISTOPHER RUDD.
YOU HAVE SHOWN YOURSELF FIT.

SO THEN RUDD PROMISED THERE WAS GONNA BE SOME KIND OF NEW *DEAL.*
"YOU'VE SEEN THE END OF HELL, AND NOW YOU'RE GONNA SEE THE END OF HEAVEN." STUFF LIKE THAT.
AT LEAST I THINK THAT'S WHAT HE SAID. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT COULD'VE BEEN "THANKS FOR COMING." IT WAS HARD TO *HEAR* OVER THE SINGING AND THE SHOUTING AND THE SPEAKING IN *TONGUES.*
AND REMIEL CRYING HIS *EYES* OUT, LIKE ONE OF THOSE OLD LADIES IN THE BACK ROW AT A *WEDDING.*
SO WHAT THE *HELL,* AS THEY SAY DOWN HERE. I MISSED THE *CORONATION,* BUT I MADE IT TO THE PARTY AFTERWARDS.
SOONER *DO* IT THAT WAY, TO BE HONEST.
I FUCKING *HATE* FORMAL OCCASIONS.

ONE TENDS TO SLIP AND *SLIDE* IN THE SOFT PLACES. BUT THE BARROWJANE NAVIGATES THEM VERY *WELL.*
WHEN SHE *BREACHES,* YOU'LL REMEMBER THINGS THAT HAVE YET TO *HAPPEN.* IT CAN BE UNSETTLING, AT FIRST.
"THERE WAS A SENSATION OF *MOVEMENT,* IN NO DIRECTION I COULD *DEFINE.*
"A SINGLE *RIPPLE* STIRRED THE SURFACE OF THE HOT, BROWN *LIQUID* IN MY CUP.
"AND IT *BEGAN.*
"I WAS IN A DIFFERENT *PLACE.*
"THE *MORNINGSTAR,* SAMAEL, WAS EXPLAINING TO THE HOST THAT THE *UNIVERSE* WAS CLOSE TO ITS ENDING.
YAHWEH'S NAME IS WRITTEN ON EVERY *ATOM* OF HIS CREATION. IT'S THE *GLUE* THAT HOLDS REALITY TOGETHER.
NOW THE GLUE ISN'T *HOLDING* AS WELL AS IT DID. WHEN IT'S GONE, YOU WILL BE TOO. ALONG WITH EVERYTHING *ELSE* THAT LIVES HERE.
"THEN I STOOD BENEATH THE *WORLD-TREE,* YGGDRASIL, AND WATCHED *SAMAEL* FIGHTING WITH HIS BROTHER ANGEL, MICHAEL.
"BOTH OF THEM ALREADY, IT SEEMED, *GRIEVOUSLY* HURT.
"I SAW MICHAEL *DIE,* HIS BLOOD DRENCHING THE *ROOTS* OF THE TREE.
"AND I SAW HIM TRY TO POUR HIS *POWER* INTO A HUMAN CHILD WHO HE CALLED HIS *DAUGHTER.*"

"IT WAS THE SCHEME OF FENRIS, THE WOLF-- TO WATER THE WORLD-TREE WITH **KIN-SHED** BLOOD.
"TO MAKE THE **DEATH** OF ALL THE WORLDS, WHICH WAS ALREADY UNDER WAY, TRULY **INEVITABLE.**
"HE LEFT THAT PLACE WELL **PLEASED** WITH ALL HIS WORK.
"BUT THE MORNINGSTAR **REMAINED,** AS MICHAEL'S DEMIURGIC POWER BLED **OUT** INTO THE WORLD.
"HE WALKED INTO THE **HEART** OF THAT TEMPEST.
"NEXT I SAW A **WOMAN** SCREAMING IN PAIN. THE PAIN OF BIRTH, WHICH I KNOW ONLY TOO **WELL.**
"BUT HER I DID **NOT** KNOW, NOR THE THING THAT SCREAMED **INSIDE** HER.
"AND IN **HELL,** THE MASSING OF A MIGHTY ARMY. DEMONS AND DAMNED **TOGETHER,** UNDER THE SAME BANNER.
"A FORCE THE **LIKE** OF WHICH CREATION HAD NEVER **SEEN.**
"THE GREAT **JUDGE,** SOLOMON, TURNED FROM HIS **PURPOSE.**
"SUMMONED FORTH TO DELIVER ONE FINAL **VERDICT** IN THE HALLS OF HEAVEN."

"BUT HEAVEN'S WALLS WERE *BLEEDING*.
"AND THE HOST OF ALL THE ANGELS COULD NOT *HEAL* THEM."

CRUX

PART 1 OF 2

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Based on characters created by
GAIMAN, KIETH and DRINGENBERG

BUT HOW DID YOU COME TO *SEE* ALL THESE THINGS, MOTHER?
AND WHY ARE YOU *TELLING* ME ABOUT THEM NOW?
I DON'T KNOW. BECAUSE LUCIFER'S FATE *CONCERNS* YOU, I SUPPOSE.
AND ALL THESE THINGS COME *BACK* TO HIM, IN THE END.
YOU DIDN'T TELL ME *HIS* FATE.
I TOLD YOU WHAT I *COULD,* MAZIKEEN. NOT ALL THINGS WERE *REVEALED* TO ME.
IF YOU'RE *THIRSTY,* DRINK FROM THIS WELL. THE WATER HERE IS VERY *PURE,* AND VERY COLD.

YOU HAVEN'T EMBRACED ME. OR WEPT ON MY SHOULDER.
OR SHOWN ANY OTHER SIGN OF BEING HAPPY TO SEE ME AGAIN.
IT'S BEEN LONG. AND YOU LEFT US OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL.
AND YOU NEVER CAME BACK.
AM I NOT PRECIOUS TO YOU, MAZIKEEN?
AM I NOT REMEMBERED?
YES. YOU ARE REMEMBERED.
WE REMEMBER WHAT YOU TOLD US TO REMEMBER.
THAT HEAVEN HAS WRONGED US. THAT WE EXIST TO AVENGE THAT WRONG. YOU SHAPED US WELL, MOTHER.
SSSUKK

I GAVE YOU *LIFE.* IS IT WRONG TO ASK FOR *LOYALTY?*
PERHAPS. I'M PROBABLY NOT THE *BEST* ONE TO ASK.
THESE DAYS MY LOYALTY IS ENGAGED *ELSEWHERE.*
WITH THE *MORNINGSTAR.* YES, I KNOW.
I DON'T *BEGRUDGE* YOU THAT. BUT I DO QUESTION THE *WISDOM* OF IT.
THE LILIM ARE NOT *FRIENDS* OF HEAVEN, OR OF HELL. THEY MAINTAIN THEIR *INDEPENDENCE.*
EXCEPT FROM *YOU,* OF COURSE.
COME. HELP ME WITH MY *WORK,* AND I'LL EXPLAIN TO YOU.
YOU CAN *STOP* NOW, SYLVIANA.
ATTEND TO YOUR *FINAL* DUTIES, AS I TAUGHT YOU.
YOU SHOULD *KNOW,* MAZIKEEN, THAT MATTERS ARE COMING TO A *CRUX.*
A POINT OF *BALANCE.*

"IN THE WORLD OF MEN, A GREAT *UNMAKING* HAS BEGUN.
"SUBTLY-- AS *ALL* GREAT THINGS GROW FROM SEEDS TOO *SMALL* TO NOTICE.
"NOTHING *BREAKS,* AS YET. NOTHING *FALLS.*
"BUT THE HANDS OF *ARTISTS* LOSE THEIR CUNNING. THE MINDS OF *MUSICIANS* THEIR SWEET CALCULUS.
"AND *EMOTION* DIES TOO. LOVER LOOKS AT *LOVER,* PARENT AT CHILD.
"FEELING *NOTHING* SAVE THE DEAD GREY VOID OF *ANOMIE.*
"THE WORLD LOSES ITS *SAVOR.* THE *SENSES* DULL.
"SWEET, SOUR, BITTER, SALT, ALL BLEED INTO ONE *NOTHINGNESS.*
"IN SHEER *DESPAIR* OF FEELING ANYTHING AT ALL, PEOPLE BEGIN TO *HURT* THEMSELVES."
IT IS YAHWEH'S *NAME,* WRITTEN IN ALL OF US.
WITH YAHWEH *GONE,* IT FADES. AND WE FADE *TOO,* BY INEXORABLE LOGIC.

YOU'RE VERY WELL *INFORMED* FOR AN EXILE, MOTHER.
I WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT THAT MUCH NEWS *REACHED* YOU BEHIND YOUR WATERFALL OF *SWORDS.*
NO. IT DOESN'T.
WHAT I *KNOW* ABOUT THESE THINGS, I'VE KNOWN FOR A LONG *TIME.*
JUST AS I'VE KNOWN THAT *YOU* WOULD COME HERE.
FROM *BRIADACH?* DID HE *PROPHESY* FOR YOU, BEFORE YOU LEFT?
HE DIDN'T *HAVE* THAT GIFT WHEN I LEFT.
THAT CAME *LATER.*
NO, I SAW THESE THINGS FOR *MYSELF.*
YOUR COMING INTO LUCIFER'S *SERVICE.* YOUR *JOURNEY* HERE.
YOUR *DEATH.*
MY *DEATH?*
WELL, IT *SEEMED* TO ME THAT YOU DIED. YOU WERE IN A DEEP *PIT,* AND EARTH WAS POURED IN OVER YOU. YOU *SCREAMED.*
WHEN DID YOU SEE THIS?
THAT'S-- HARDER TO *EXPLAIN,* MY LOVE.
BUT I'LL *TRY.*

"AFTER *IBRIEL* DIED, I FOUND MY USUAL SOLACES *DENIED* TO ME.
"I HAD *LOVED* HIM, AND MY OWN CHILDREN HAD *KILLED* HIM.
"IT WAS *HARD* FOR ME TO BEAR.
"THAT WAS AN *ENDLESS* TIME FOR ME. I WATCHED YOU ALL GROW INTO YOUR *POWER,* AND I OUGHT TO HAVE REJOICED.
"BUT MY HEART WAS BECOME AN EMPTY *ROOM,* SILTED WITH *DUST.*
"FINALLY I *LEFT.* TAKING NOTHING WITH ME. NOT *CARING* WHETHER I LIVED OR DIED.
"DEATH WAS *PREFERABLE* TO THIS TEDIOUS LABYRINTH OF GRIEF.
"BUT I *REALIZED* AS I WALKED THAT HEAVEN HAD *CONSPIRED* IN MY SUFFERING.
"AND I FOUND THAT MY *HATRED* OF CRUEL YAHWEH, MY MAKER, MADE THE HURT *LESSEN.*
"SO I *NURTURED* IT, AND FED IT. AS I STILL *DO.*
"I WENT INTO THE *SOFT* PLACES, WHERE TIME AND SPACE *FLOW* LIKE WATER.
"I SLEPT UNDER *CHANGING* SKIES, AND MY SLEEP WAS *TROUBLED.*"

"I WAS AWARE THAT SOMEONE *FOLLOWED* ME. WATCHED ME.
"HE LEFT *FOOD* FOR ME SOMETIMES AT THE EDGE OF MY CAMP. AND ONCE HE KILLED A *PREDATOR* THAT MUST HAVE BEEN HUNTING ME.
"ONE NIGHT I BENT MYSELF TO THE TASK OF FINDING WHERE *HE* SLEPT.
"AND STOLE UPON HIM *UNAWARES* AS HE PREPARED YET ANOTHER OFFERING FOR ME."
MOTHER.
BRIADACH.
I-- I WAS *WORRIED* ABOUT YOU IN THESE WILD PLACES, ALONE.
I *CHOSE* TO BE ALONE. BUT IF I LOOKED FOR SOCIETY, *YOURS* WOULD BE THE LAST I'D SEEK.
PATRICIDE.

WE KILLED IBRIEL BECAUSE WE LOVED YOU.
TO AVENGE HIS SLIGHTING OF YOU.
I KNEW THAT. BUT I DIDN'T CARE.
FAMILY HAD ALWAYS BEEN THE THING THAT MATTERED MOST TO ME. YOU. THE ARMY OF MY CHILDREN.
BUT GRIEF HARDENED ME. I SAW THINGS DIFFERENTLY NOW.
"THE SOFT PLACES ARE DOORWAYS INTO CHAOS. INTO THE TIMELESS VOID BEYOND CREATION.
"I WALKED ON INTO CHAOS, AND THE EARTH BEAT LIKE A HEART BENEATH MY FEET.
"THE GOING BECAME MORE TREACHEROUS THE FURTHER I WENT. SOLID GROUND COULD NO LONGER BE RELIED ON.
"THE LAWS THAT GOVERN BRUTE MATTER WERE COMING UNDONE.
"I THOUGHT I MUST DIE NOW, AND I WAS NOT AVERSE.
"BUT AS SO OFTEN WHEN MY BACK IS TO THE WALL--"

"--LIFE STRETCHED OUT A *HAND* TO ME."
BJ's
macrobiotic
RESTAURANT

"THE HOUSE WAS *IMPOSSIBLE.* STANDING FIRM AND UNTROUBLED AS *REALITY* BUCKED AND HEAVED AROUND IT.
"THE STRANGE *SIGILS* ON ITS WALLS SEEMING TO PROMISE *EPIPHANIES* AND REVELATIONS.
"I DECIDED TO *GO* THERE.
"AND SEE WHAT *MEANINGS* IT HELD FOR *ME.*"
OPEN
LEAVE YOUR HANG-UPS OUT ON THE STREET.
O

GOOD *DAY* TO YOU, LILITH OF EDEN GARDEN.
YOU ARE MOST *WELCOME* HERE.
YOU *KNOW* ME?
"HE INCLINED HIS HEAD, ON WHICH NO EXPRESSION COULD BE SEEN."
WE ARE HERE *EXPRESSLY* ON YOUR ACCOUNT.
PLEASE. STEP INSIDE. THE WEATHER IS *INCLEMENT.*
HAVE YOU A *RETINUE?*
SERVANTS? COMPANIONS?
NO.
I'M *ALONE.*
YOU CAN CLOSE THE *DOOR.*
CLOSED
LEAVE YOUR HANG-UPS OUT ON THE STREET.

"THERE IS NOT MUCH *ROOM* FOR REGRET IN THE LIFE I'VE CHOSEN.
MOTHER!
"BUT FOR *THIS* I AM SORRY.
"THAT ALL THOSE *MILLENNIA* OF PAIN WERE *WAITING* FOR HIM--
"AND I COULD HAVE *SAVED* HIM WITH A SINGLE *WORD.*
"YET I DID NOT *SPEAK.*"

HAVE YOU *WAITED* ALL THIS TIME JUST TO MAKE YOUR *CONFESSION,* MOTHER?
NO. I WAITED FOR THE *CRUX.*
AND *NOW* THE CRUX HAS COME.
THIS CAN *END.*
IT'S NOT *NEEDED* ANY LONGER.
YOU ALWAYS LET ME WALK *AHEAD* OF YOU. IS THIS DUTY OR *CAUTION?*
WHAT DO *YOU* THINK?
THAT IT DOESN'T *MATTER.* BECAUSE OUR PATHS *PART* VERY SOON.
YOU'RE *LEAVING?*
OH YES.
AND YOUR *SERVANTS* ARE DYING.
THEY WERE NEVER REALLY *ALIVE.*
THIS PLACE IS MORE LIKE A *LIMB* OR AN ORGAN THAN ANYTHING ELSE. OR A *SEED,* PERHAPS.
SEEDS DON'T DIE. THEY *TRANSFORM* INTO A DIFFERENT KIND OF *LIFE.*

MY DEAR *LADY.*
WHAT YOU MUST HAVE *BEEN* THROUGH!
WHAT *IS* THIS PLACE? AND WHO ARE *YOU?*
THIS PLACE IS *BARROWJANE.* OUR *PIED-A-TERRE* HERE IN THE SOFT PLACES.
I AM *BERIM,* OF THE JIN EN MOK. THIS IS *SANDALPHON.* AND THE *SILK MAN* YOU'VE ALREADY MET.
WE COME HERE FROM NUMEROUS MOMENTS, BOTH IN YOUR PAST AND IN YOUR FUTURE.
WE CAME TOGETHER BY *CHANCE,* INITIALLY-- BUT STAYED TO MEET YOU. TO THROW OURSELVES IN YOUR *PATH,* AS IT WERE.
WHY?
HA HA! WHY INDEED, WHY INDEED.
BECAUSE WE *NEED* YOU.
BECAUSE WE CAN DO *NOTHING* WITHOUT YOU.
BUT YOU MUST BE *TIRED.* PLEASE-- SIT DOWN.
I'LL HAVE *TINA* BRING REFRESHMENT.

THIS HOUSE-- WHAT IS IT *MADE* FROM? IT SEEMS TO *BREATHE.*
IT *DOES* BREATHE. THE BARROWJANE IS A LIVING *ENTITY.*
SHE HOUSES US AND FEEDS US, AND *SLIVERS* OF HER SUBSTANCE SERVE US.
BUT SHE'S OLD, AND HER ABILITY TO CAMOUFLAGE HERSELF HAS FALLEN *OFF* SOMEWHAT.
TEA AND *CAKE,* TINA.
HI I AM TINA
SURE.
UMM... THE ANGEL LOOKS LIKE HE'S GONNA *DIE.* DID YOU WANT TO *SPEAK* TO HIM AGAIN?
HMM. ACTUALLY, I SUPPOSE *LILITH'S* ARRIVAL MAKES HIM A LITTLE-- *IRRELEVANT.*
THEN LET'S BE *RID* OF HIM.
FOR SOME REASON THE PROXIMITY OF *ANGELS* MAKES ME THINK OF *DEATH.*
VERY WELL, THEN. I'LL *DO* IT.
I *SAID* I WOULD, AND I'M A MAN OF MY *WORD.*
I BELIEVE THAT YOU *TOO,* DEAR LADY, HAVE A CERTAIN *ANIMUS* AGAINST THE HOST OF HEAVEN.
I HATE THEM. I HATE THEM *ALL,* SAVE ONLY SAMAEL.
JUST SO. IN THAT CASE, I THINK YOU MAY *ENJOY* THIS.

I WON'T-- *TELL* YOU.
I WON'T TELL YOU *ANYTHING.*
WELL, IT'S AS LONG AS IT'S *BROAD,* OLD MAN.
WE HAVE SOMEONE *ELSE* ON THE JOB NOW.
SHE'S-- NOT AN ANGEL-- CAN'T-- HELP--
TRUE. VERY TRUE.
BUT SHE *DOES* KNOW THE STRUCTURE OF THE SILVER *CITY.*
GUUUH!
SHE *BUILT* IT, YOU SEE.

CUT HIM DOWN AND THROW HIM OUT, TINA.
YOU GOT IT.
AND CLEAN MY SPEAR, IF YOU'D BE SO KIND.
MY APOLOGIES. I SHOULD HAVE ASKED YOU IF YOU WANTED TO ADMINISTER THE COUP DE GRACE.
I DON'T TAKE ANY PLEASURE IN SLAUGHTER FOR ITS OWN SAKE.
AH. I DO, RATHER.
BUT THIS WAS NOT AS GRATUITOUS AS IT SEEMED.
IF HE'D LIVED, HE WOULD HAVE TRIED TO WARN THE HOST ABOUT OUR GRAND DESIGN.
AND WHAT'S THAT?
TO SMASH THE THRONE OF HEAVEN, RAPE AND MURDER ITS HOST OF ANGELS, AND CLOSE THE DOORS OF CREATION IN YAHWEH'S FACE.
SPEAKING OF WHICH, BY THE WAY--
--WE WERE HOPING TO ENLIST YOU.

MOTHER, YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THINGS THAT HAPPENED *EONS* AGO.
YES. I KNOW. BUT FOR *ME,* THAT WAS WHEN *EVERYTHING* CHANGED.
WHEN I CAME TO THE *POINT* OF DECISION, AND *DECIDED.*
THERE ARE *TWO* HORSES HERE. WHEREVER YOU'RE GOING, I'M *NOT* COMING WITH YOU.
BECAUSE THE MORNINGSTAR *EXPECTS* YOU?
YES.
BUT HE *DOESN'T.*
HE WENT TO THE ROOTS OF *YGGDRASIL,* AND HE NEVER CAME BACK.
KAROOOOM

THE MORE *REASON* I HAVE TO GO TO HIM.
BUT BY THE TIME YOU WENT, YOU WOULDN'T *FIND* HIM THERE.
YOU SHOULD GO WITH *ME,* AND LEARN WHERE HE IS *NOW.*
IF YOU *KNOW* WHERE LUCIFER IS, THEN *TELL* ME.
MY PATIENCE IS ENDED.
WELL, I'D HOPED THAT FILIAL *AFFECTION* WOULD HAVE BROUGHT YOU A LITTLE *FURTHER* ALONG THE ROAD--
--BUT PERHAPS THIS WAY IS *BEST,* AFTER ALL.

LUCIFER'S COSMOS.
"MY *DAUGHTER*--
"--I HAVE *SEEN* THIS BEFORE, AND I *KNOW* WHERETO IT TENDS.
"IN ENDLESS *ITERATION,* LIKE *WAVES* AGAINST THE BASE OF A CLIFF.
"THE *FUTURE,* ERODING THE ROOTLESS *ISLANDS* OF OUR EXPERIENCE, MOMENT BY MOMENT.
"IT WILL *END.*
"*EVERYTHING* WILL END.
"*BECAUSE* OF OUR EFFORTS, OR IN *SPITE* OF THEM.
"IT MATTERS *NOT.*
"I'VE *SEEN* IT.
"IF I SEEM *RUTHLESS* NOW--
"--IT'S BECAUSE I'VE ALREADY *MOURNED* YOU."

MANY EONS AGO.
IF ANY PLACE SHOULD BE WATERED WITH *TEARS,* LADY LILITH--
--THEN IT SHOULD BE *THIS--*
--THE *WORLD-TREE.* WHICH IN TIMES TO COME, SOME WILL CALL *YGGDRASIL.*
AND WHICH IS ABOUT TO BE *POISONED* BY THE BLOOD OF THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL.

CRUX

PART 2 OF 2

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BASED ON CHARACTERS CREATED BY
GAIMAN, KIETH AND DRINGENBERG

AND THIS IS IN A *FUTURE* TIME, BERIM?
IN THE *SOFT* PLACES, TIME AS SUCH HAS NO CLEAR *MEANING* OR DIRECTION.
BUT YES. YOU WOULD HAVE TO LIVE A THOUSAND THOUSAND *YEARS* TO REACH THIS POINT BY *NORMAL* MEANS.
BUT THE *BARROWJANE* FOLLOWS THE GRADIENTS OF TIME TO FIND THE ASYNCHRONOUS *KRILL* ON WHICH SHE FEEDS.
SHE ALLOWS US A CERTAIN FREEDOM OF *MOVEMENT* HERE. AND PROTECTION FROM THE *ELEMENTS.*
NOW PLEASE TO PAY *ATTENTION.* THAT IS MICHAEL FALLING.
HE HAS *FOUGHT* WITH HIS BROTHER LUCIFER, AND HE HAS *LOST.*
NOW HE'S DYING. AND HIS BLOOD *STAINS* THE ROOTS OF THE WORLD-TREE.
THE FALL OF ALL THE *WORLDS,* ALREADY SET IN MOTION WHEN YAHWEH ABDICATED, NOW BECOMES *INEVITABLE.*
BUT IT ISN'T *ENOUGH,* OF COURSE.
IT ISN'T *NEARLY* ENOUGH.

THERE IS A POWER WITHIN ME. THE DUNAMIS DEMIURGOS. GOD'S POWER.
WHEN I DIE, IT WILL POUR OUT OF ME AND OVERWHELM EVERYTHING THAT EXISTS.
I'M DYING NOW, ELAINE.
YOU HAVE TO TAKE THE POWER FROM ME.
TAKE IT-- TAKE IT FROM YOU?
SHE'S NOT STRONG ENOUGH. IT WILL DESTROY HER.
I CAN THINK OF NO OTHER WAY.
FATHER. OH GOD, I'M SORRY I NEVER CAME TO YOU. NEVER TRIED TO TALK--
IT WOULD HAVE DONE NO GOOD. I WAS PROUD, AND STUBBORN.
I COULD HAVE SOUGHT YOU OUT. I COULD HAVE--
AAAAHHRRR!

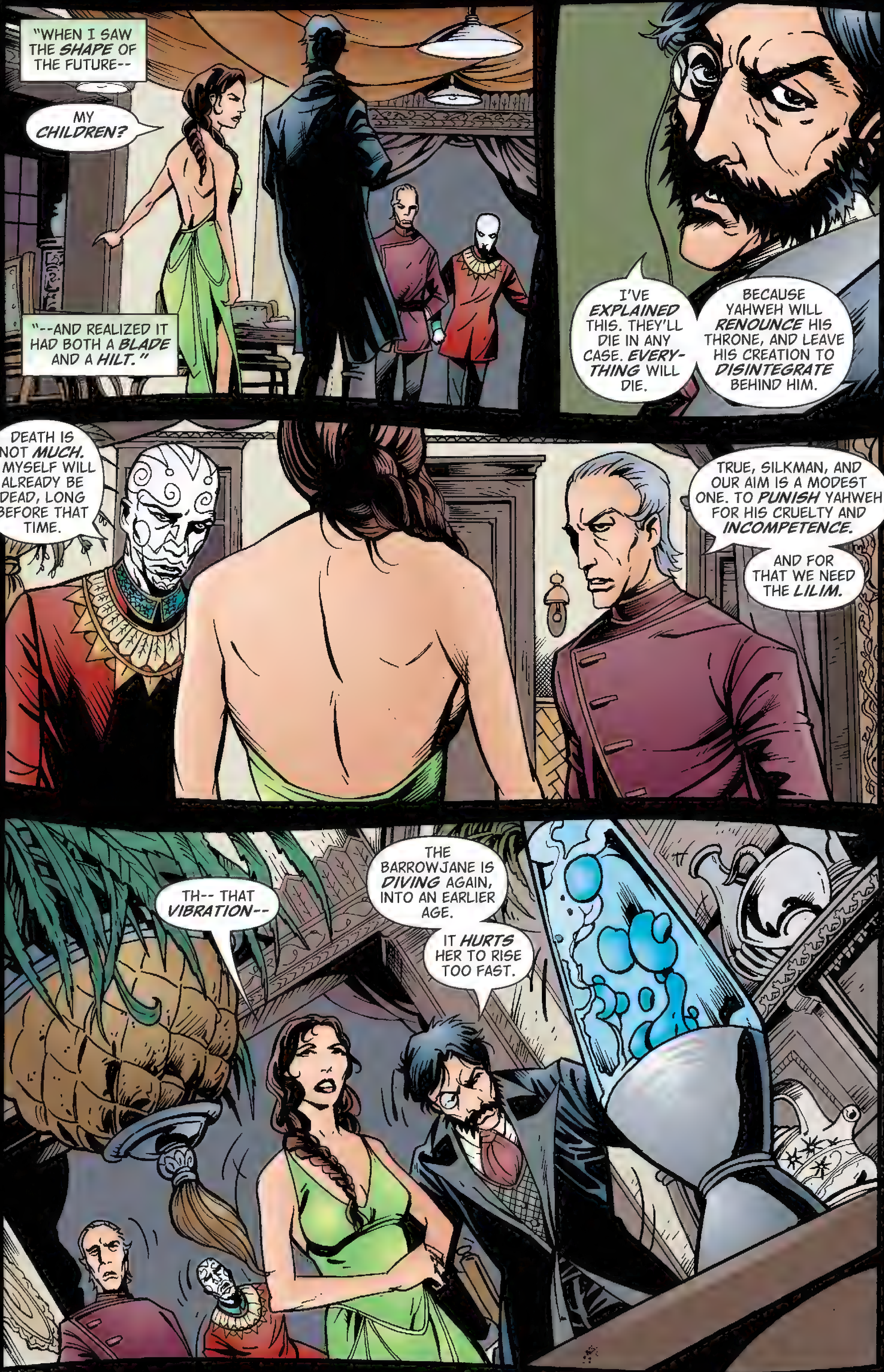
OH GOD! OH GOD!
IT'S KILLING ME!
YES. SO I SEE.
THE POWER IS POURING INTO YOU. AND YOU'RE TOO SMALL.
IT NEEDS TO WELL UP FROM INSIDE YOU. THEN YOU'D HAVE SOME CHANCE OF SURVIVING IT.
FROM INSIDE? HOW-- HOW DO I--?
I HAVE NO IDEA. YOU'RE THE DEMIURGE.
PERHAPS IT COMES DOWN TO INSTINCT.

AND THAT'S THE LAST WE SEE OF THEM. BUT THEN WE'RE CLOSE TO THE POINT AT WHICH ALL THINGS END.
IT'S HARD EVEN FOR THE BARROWJANE TO SWIM AGAINST THESE CURRENTS.
WHY DID YOU SHOW ME THIS?
SO THAT YOU'D UNDERSTAND. IT IS A CHAIN-- A LOGICAL SEQUENCE.
GOD ABANDONS HIS THRONE, AND CREATION BEGINS TO CRUMBLE.
THEN FENRIS USES MICHAEL'S BLOOD TO ACCELERATE THE PROCESS.
AND SHOULD YAHWEH LIVE AND PROSPER WHILE THE WORLDS FALL?
ISN'T IT WORTH ANY COST TO MAKE HIM PAY FOR THIS?
YOU KNOW MY FEELINGS ON THAT. BUT WHAT WOULD THE COST BE?
YOUR CHILDREN.
WILL IT PLEASE YOU TO COME IN OUT OF THE COLD?

"'YOUR *CHILDREN,*' HE SAID. 'WILL IT PLEASE YOU TO COME IN OUT OF THE *COLD?*'
"BUT I NEVER *COULD,* OF COURSE.
"NOT SINCE THAT *DAY.*"

ARE YOU SURE THAT THIS PART IS *NECESSARY,* BERIM?
YOU'VE *SEEN* IT.

SHE'S ONE OF THOSE WHO'D *OPPOSE* US.
AND *HER* VOICE WOULD BE LISTENED TO.
I KNOW. BUT I WISH I COULD *EXPLAIN* TO HER.
THAT THIS VENGEANCE IS AGAINST *YAHWEH* AND HIS ANGELS, NOT HER OR *LUCIFER*.
SHE'D *STILL* FIGHT YOU. SHE WOULDN'T *CARE* ABOUT YOUR REASONS.
"AND THAT WAS *TRUE*, OF COURSE.
"MY HATE WAS SO *PRIVATE*, IT COULDN'T BE TRANSLATED INTO ANY OTHER *LANGUAGE*.
"ALL I COULD DO NOW WAS SEE IT *OUT* TO ITS END.
"THE END I HAD BEEN SHOWN SO MANY YEARS *BEFORE*."


"WHEN I SAW THE *SHAPE* OF THE FUTURE--
MY *CHILDREN?*
"--AND REALIZED IT HAD BOTH A *BLADE* AND A *HILT.*"
I'VE *EXPLAINED* THIS. THEY'LL DIE IN ANY CASE. *EVERYTHING* WILL DIE.
BECAUSE YAHWEH WILL *RENOUNCE* HIS THRONE, AND LEAVE HIS CREATION TO *DISINTEGRATE* BEHIND HIM.
DEATH IS NOT *MUCH.* I MYSELF WILL ALREADY BE DEAD, LONG BEFORE THAT TIME.
TRUE, SILKMAN, AND OUR AIM IS A MODEST ONE. TO *PUNISH* YAHWEH FOR HIS CRUELTY AND *INCOMPETENCE.*
AND FOR THAT WE NEED THE *LILIM.*
TH-- THAT *VIBRATION--*
THE BARROWJANE IS *DIVING* AGAIN, INTO AN EARLIER AGE.
IT *HURTS* HER TO RISE TOO FAST.

EDEN GARDEN. WE'VE COME FROM THE END OF TIME TO ITS BEGINNING.
THERE IS NO BEGINNING. THIS OCEAN HAS NO FLOOR.
BUT WHEN YOU LEAVE, IT WOULD BE BEST IF YOU WERE CLOSE TO THE POINT AT WHICH YOU ENTERED.

PAY THAT NO *HEED.* THE BARROWJANE IS A *FILTER* FEEDER.
SOMETIMES SHE *SWALLOWS* THINGS THAT SHE CAN'T DIGEST.
"I TURNED MY EYES FROM MY FALLEN SON. ALREADY REHEARSING FOR GREATER *BETRAYALS.*"
WHAT DO YOU NEED THE LILIM TO *DO?*
TO *TAKE* THE SILVER CITY.
WE THOUGHT THAT HAVING *BUILT* IT, YOU MIGHT KNOW OF A SECRET WAY PAST ITS *WALLS.*
AND *THEN?*
YOU MUST *SMASH* THE THRONE-- THE PRIMUM MOBILE.
IT IS THE FIRST THING YAHWEH *MADE,* AND THE LAST *LINK* BETWEEN HIM AND HIS CREATION.
IF YAHWEH SHOULD *RETURN,* HE MIGHT STILL SAVE HEAVEN. AND THOSE MOST *RESPONSIBLE* FOR THIS DISASTER WOULD THEN ESCAPE ITS CONSEQUENCES.
SMASH THE *THRONE* AND THAT CANNOT HAPPEN. THE HOST ARE THEN *ALONE,* AND POWERLESS.
WHAT ABOUT THE *GIRL?* MICHAEL'S DAUGHTER?
THE *GIRL* IS NOTHING.
IT IS *CERTAIN.* SHE *MUST* MISCARRY.

"THE POWER IS TOO *FIERCE* AND CORROSIVE.
"AND SHE IS TOO *FRAIL* A VESSEL.
"AS I SAID, WE HAVE NOT *FOUND* HER ON TIME'S FURTHER SHORE.
"SHE IS *SWALLOWED* BY THE POWER, AND SHE DOES NOT *EMERGE* AGAIN.
"WE BELIEVE SHE IS *DISMANTLED* BY IT.
"SHE *IS,* AFTER ALL, PARTLY OF *HUMAN* FLESH.
"AND IN THAT *FURNACE,* FLESH IS LIKE *CHAFF* IN A HURRICANE.
"WHAT COULD SHE *HAVE* TO SET AGAINST THAT WIND OF FIRE?
"HER *WILL?* HER HOPE? HER SMATTERING OF HALF-GLIMPSED *WISDOM?*
"NOTHING.
"SHE HAS *NOTHING."*

WELL, LADY? SPEAK. WILL YOU MAKE *CAUSE* WITH US?
WHAT CAUSE IS *THAT?*
DO YOU SEEK ANYTHING *BEYOND* DESTRUCTION?
DESTRUCTION IS A SINGLE *BEAT* OF THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING HEART.
THERE WILL BE *OTHER* CREATIONS. AND OTHER *MAKERS,* FAR MORE WORTHY.
IT'S TOO *MUCH* TO DO OUT OF HATRED. BUT THE CREATURES WHO *DWELL* IN THOSE OTHER CREATIONS--
--MIGHT THEY BECOME *MORE* THAN TOYS? MORE THAN *PUPPETS* ENACTING THEIR MAKER'S WILL?
IT IS TO BE *HOPED.*
THEN I'M *YOURS.*
WHEN THE *CRUX* COMES, I'LL LEAD MY CHILDREN AGAINST THE WALLS OF *HEAVEN.*
DEAR LADY, I'M *DELIGHTED* TO HEAR IT.
WE'LL ALL *LEAVE* SOON, AND GO BACK INTO THE WORLDS. I'M AFRAID THE WAIT WILL BE *LONG.*

LILIM CAMP.
"BUT THE *FRUITION,* WHEN IT FINALLY COMES--
"--ALL THE *SWEETER* FOR THAT."
WELL? WILL NONE OF YOU *WELCOME* ME?
WILL NONE OF YOU GIVE ME THE *HONOR* THAT IS MY DUE?

WELCOME *HOME.*
MOTHER.
AH. HOME...
IS *THAT* WHAT THIS IS?

AND HAVE WE FALLEN SO FAR, MISRAN?
M--MOTHER?
I'VE WONDERED OFTEN HOW THINGS MIGHT HAVE GONE WITH YOU WHILE I WAS AWAY.
BUT THIS--
--THIS IS WORSE THAN MY WORST IMAGININGS.
I BADE YOU FIGHT FOR EDEN GARDEN, AND YOU'VE PITCHED YOUR TENTS IN A DESERT!
BRIADACH MADE MAZIKEEN OUR WAR LEADER. AND MAZIKEEN PLEDGED OUR SERVICE TO LUCIFER.
WE DECIDED--
DO THE LILIM SERVE?
DO THE LILIM EAT YAHWEH'S LEAVINGS? OR ADAM'S? NO.
THEN WHY SHOULD THEY EAT LUCIFER'S?

YOU HAVE FOLLOWED FALSE *PROPHETS.* FALSE *LEADERS.*
ONE OF THEM IS *THERE,* A BROKEN REED. BRING ME TO THE *OTHER.*
DO NOT *TOUCH* HER.
IT'S-- ONLY *WATER.* I THOUGHT SHE MIGHT BE--
DO NOT *APPROACH* HER.
LEST *HER* FATE FALL ALSO ON *YOU.*

BRIADACH.
MOTHER.
DID YOU SEE ME *COMING?*
I SEE THE *SEED,* AND I SEE THE *ROT.*
ROT IS WHAT YOU *BRING.* OF *COURSE* I SAW YOU COMING.
YOU HAVE BEEN THE *STEWARD* OF MY CHILDREN. AND YOU HAVE *BETRAYED* THEM.
AAAAAA!
BUT NOW THEIR TIME IS AT *HAND.*
NO. ONLY *CHAOS* IS AT HAND.
CHAOS, AND THEN A *SILENCE* THAT LASTS FOREVER.

I KNOW WHAT YOUR FRIENDS *SHOWED* YOU.
AND WHAT THEY *FAILED* TO SHOW YOU.
THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN A *CHANCE* FOR LIFE.
FOR THE WORLDS TO *ENDURE.*
BUT WHEN THE SILVER CITY *FALLS,* AND WHEN THE THRONE IS BROKEN, *NOTHING* THEN CAN--
KLUD
GAG HIM? MOTHER, IS THAT--?
IF HE *SCREAMS.* OR IF HE WAKES AND TRYS TO *SPEAK* WITH YOU...
A SACRIFICE SHOULD BE *SOLEMN.*
LET US TRY NOT TO *MAR* IT.
TAKE HIM OUTSIDE, AND LAY HIM *DOWN* BESIDE HIS WICKED *SISTER.*
BIND HIS HANDS. AND IF HE SCREAMS, STOP HIS *MOUTH.*

OH, THANK GOD!
IT'S STILL THERE!
LUCIFER, IT'S ALL STILL THERE!
THANK WHO?
THERE'S GROUND. AND SKY. EVERYTHING.
TO TOUCH. TO BREATHE.
YOU CAN'T AFFORD THEM, ELAINE.
I CAN'T--?
NO. KEEP IT SIMPLE. KEEP IT DOWN TO ONE THING.
NO REFRACTION OF THE LIGHT. NO MOVING PARTS.
BELIEVE ME, THIS IS HARDER THAN IT LOOKS.
IMAGINE A SPACE.
THIS IS A SPACE. WHERE WE ARE. THIS IS--
THIS IS THE ABSENCE OF SPACE. PUSH AGAINST IT.
MAKE IT BACK AWAY FROM YOU. SO THAT YOU CAN FILL IT.
LIKE THIS?
YES. LIKE THAT.
THAT'S EXCELLENT.

NOW WE *BEGIN.*

2004

TWICE SHE TRIED.
AND TWICE SHE FAILED TO MAKE THE BEAUTY THAT WAS IN HER MIND COME OUT INTO THE LIGHT.
THE FIRST WORLD WAS TOO FRAIL.
IT FELL TO PIECES IN HER HANDS, IN HER THOUGHTS.
THE STRONG WORDS SHE WHISPERED TO BRING IT INTO LIFE TORE THROUGH IT LIKE STORM WINDS.
AND IT FELL INTO THE GREAT GULF AS LEAVES FALL AT SUMMER'S END.
THE SECOND WORLD WAS STRONGER, BUT IT WAS DEAD.
NOTHING SHE COULD SAY OR DO WOULD BREATHE THE LIFE INTO IT.
SO SHE CURSED IT. AND HER CURSE SPLIT IT IN TWO.
ONE HALF SHE STILL SITS ON, AS A THRONE. THE OTHER THE MOCKER TOOK AS HIS PORTION.
AND THE MOCKER SAID TO HER, "THIS IS NOT THE WAY."
"WHAT A FOOL YOU ARE, ELAINE, TO GO THUS ABOUT TO MAKE A WORLD."

IF YOU'RE SO *CLEVER*, LUCIFER, WHY AREN'T *YOU* DOING THIS?
IT'S NOT ME WHO NEEDS TO *LEARN*.
WHAT I *NEED* IS TO FIND A WAY *OUT* OF THIS STUPID PLACE.
THIS STUPID PLACE IS A *UNIVERSE*.
BUT I DIDN'T EVEN MEAN TO *MAKE* IT.
I KNOW. YOU WERE TRYING TO *COPE* WITH MICHAEL'S POWER WHEN HE DIED. TO DRAW IT OFF AND *EARTH* IT.
AND INSTEAD YOU DID *THIS*. YOU MADE A THIRD *CREATION*, TO STAND ALONGSIDE YAHWEH'S AND MY OWN.
BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE HAVE TO *SIT* HERE AND PLAY *GOD* GAMES.
IF THE *REAL* UNIVERSE IS FALLING APART, WE SHOULD BE TRYING TO GET *BACK* THERE SO WE CAN HELP.
THE EXIT DOESN'T *EXIST* YET. WHEN IT DOES, WE'LL *TAKE* IT.
WELL, THANKS A *LOT*.
THAT'S JUST *PERFECT*.

AND THEN SHE SAID THE WORD PERFECT.
AND HEYA! THE THIRD WORLD-- THE PERFECT WORLD, WHERE WE LIVE NOW-- WAS BORN.

The Yahweh Dance

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BUT SHE LOOKED UPON THE EARTH, AND THERE WAS NOTHING TO LOOK BACK AT HER.
"THIS IS NOT GOOD," SHE SAID. "THIS IS NOT FIT. WHERE ARE THEY THAT SHALL KNOW ME?"
SO SHE RAN HER HAND THROUGH THE WATERS, AND THE WATERS TEEMED.
WHALE AND SHARK AND TURTLE AND RAY WERE BORN TO KNOW HER.
SHE LET HER SHADOW FALL ON THE LAND.
DEER AND CAT AND HORSE AND BADGER WERE BORN TO KNOW HER.
SHE BREATHED OUT HER BREATH INTO THE SKY.
EAGLE AND JAY AND PEACOCK WERE BORN TO KNOW HER.
AND LAST SHE MIXED HER SPIT WITH THE DIRT OF THE EARTH, AND SHAPED IT WITH HER FINGERS.
MAN WAS BORN TO KNOW HER.
BUT IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING THAT SHE HAD MADE--
--THE MOCKER STILL MOCKED, GIVING OUT SCORN AS A SNAKE GIVES POISON.

What exactly are you doing?
MY BEST.
IT'S EASY FOR YOU TO SNEER. YOU'VE DONE THIS BEFORE.
AND I CAN'T EVEN SEE WHAT I'M DOING.
I HAVE TO SORT OF FEEL IT WITH MY MIND, AND THEN GUESS WHAT IT ALL MEANS.
Let me rephrase the question. What are you doing now?
IT WAS TOO COLD.
AND THE DECAY-- THING-- WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE. THAT WASN'T WORKING RIGHT.
SO I'VE MADE THE CORE OF THE WORLD MOLTEN, TO RAISE THE SURFACE TEMPERATURE.
AND I'VE PUT IN SOME BUGS THAT EAT DEAD THINGS. DO YOU THINK THAT'LL DO IT?
Sorry.
This is called learning by doing.

AND THE EARTH SHOOK.
AND THE HEAVENS RAINED FIRE.
"SURELY," THE PEOPLE SAID, "THE UNNAMED IS ANGRY WITH US, THAT HE SHAKES THE EARTH AND MAKES THE HEAVENS TO RAIN FIRE."
"LET US MAKE OUR PEACE WITH HIM."
AND THE COMELIEST WOMEN AND THE STRONGEST MEN CHOSE THEY FROM AMONGST THEM.
AND THESE THEY SANCTIFIED WITH PRAYERS AND BLESSINGS.
THEN THEY GAVE THEM TO THE FIRE, SAYING "THIS WE DO FOR HIM, THE UNNAMED, THAT HE WILL FAVOR US."

NO!
That's an activity that ***never*** goes out of fashion.
If you imagine you can ***stop*** it, or even slow it down, you're going to be ***disappointed.***
IT'S GOING ***WRONG.***
Really? How?
THEY'RE ***KILLING*** EACH OTHER!
BUT THEY'RE DOING IT IN ***MY*** NAME.
They haven't ***given*** you a name.
I MEAN THEIR ***CREATOR'S*** NAME. IT COMES TO THE SAME ***THING.***
OH TO ***HELL*** WITH THIS.
I'M GOING ***IN.***

And then it was that she walked among us.
Saying "I am she, thy maker, thy unnamed."
"But from this time forth you will call me Elaine."
"And you will make no more sacrifices unto me."
"I will not receive them, nor the prayers that go with them."
"But if you pray with unfeigned heart, and contrite spirit, then only will I hear you."
"And I will keep you safe."
"Even for love of you who are my people."

AND THOSE THAT WERE BY SAW THAT HER HAND, WHERE SHE DID QUENCH THE VOLCANO, WAS BLACK WITH SOOT.
THIS THEY TOOK TO BE A SIGN.
AND THEY SAID "WE WILL BE THE PEOPLE OF THE MARK."
"EVERY CHILD THAT IS BORN ALIVE AMONGST US, WE WILL INSCRIBE WITH THE MARK, TO SIGNIFY OUR COVENANT WITH ELAINE."
WHICH COVENANT ELAINE DID KEEP, AS SHE HAD PROMISED EREWHILE.
SO THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE MARK SPREAD THEIR DOMINION FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA.
AND THEY MULTIPLIED, AND WAXED NUMEROUS.
UNTIL THEY DID COVER UP THE LAND.
UH OH.
AND STARVATION AND PLAGUE FELL UPON THEM.
AND BECAME THEIR NEMESIS.

IT'S THE *BUGS.* THE ONES I MADE TO BREAK DOWN THINGS THAT HAD *DIED.*
THEY'VE *MUTATED,* AND NOW THEY'RE *KILLING* PEOPLE!
SO?
SO I'LL MUTATE THEM *BACK.*
I SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO *THAT* WITHOUT--
...
BUT THEN THE *POPULATION* CRISIS WILL JUST GET WORSE.
THEY'LL *STARVE,* AND MURDER EACH OTHER FOR *FOOD.*
DO YOU HAVE A *BETTER* SOLUTION IN MIND?
I THINK--
I THINK MAYBE I'LL DO *NOTHING.*

In that time, one in three was taken. There were no hands to turn the plough, or work the pump.
Many there were that said Elaine had turned her face and her favor forever away from us.
But the assayers of the faith examined those that said so.
With patience and skill they shepherded the people of the mark back unto the paths of virtue.
And in due course Elaine smiled on her children again, as she was formerly wont to do.
They remembered the covenant, then, and went forth in great numbers to carry her word into distant lands-- lands of ice and fire and strange beasts.

In Terek Noi, to their amazement, they encountered a people who knew not Elaine--
--but worshipped instead an idol in the form of a great dog, which they called Arooon.
OH SHIIIIIIT!
The assayers of the faith took charge of their souls--
--and taught them of their grievous error.
HOW DID I MISS THAT? HOW COULD I MISS A WHOLE OTHER RACE?
I CAN'T DO THIS ANYMORE. I JUST CAN'T!
YOU HAVE TO DO IT.
TRUST ME.
THERE IS A POINT-- AND YOU'RE NEARLY THERE.

HWAET! IN FLOOD OF FLAME, AROOON FLEW DOWN FROM SKY HOUSE.
THE HEAT, THE HIDE, THE HAIR-- NO DOUBT HAD THEY THAT WITNESSED.
"I AM THY LORD," QUOD HE. "LISTEN, AND LEARN MY LORE."
"FEAR NOT THY FETTERS, AS FRAIL AS FALSE MEN'S FAITH."
CURSED ARE THESE CARLS THAT CLOG AND CUMBER THEE."
RISE FROM AMONG THEM. RUIN WILL I WREAK HERE."
"BUT IN MY PAW-PRINTS SHALT THOU PASS, PROTECTED."
"STRUCK STILL AS STONES, THESE STRANGERS SHALL NOT STAY THEE."
"SO GRIEVE NOT, FOR THY GOD IS NOW THY GUIDE."

"AND WITH FORTRESS WALLS WILL I FOLD THEE FAST."
"HIGH UNTO HEAVEN HEAVE THE TREES, TO HIDE THEE."
"THAT MAN MAY NOT MAR OR MELL WITH THEM THAT ARE MINE."
AND IF *THAT* DOESN'T WORK, I'M GIVING *UP.*

And the Great Wall stood.
For a thousand years, or perhaps a little longer.
On the Northern side of it, monsoons fell perpetually, year after year.
While to the South, there was eternal drought.
A land of fire where nothing could grow.
That's what I heard, anyway.
What's your version?
PRETTY MUCH THE SAME AS ***YOURS,*** ESPEDON.
EXCEPT THAT AROOON WAS A ***WOLF*** GOD. AND YOUR ***ELAINE*** I NEVER HEARD OF.
It doesn't matter. We're pretty much a secular society now.
Nobody actually believes in her anymore.
WELL ***SOMETHING*** BUILT THE WALL, AND IT SURE WASN'T US.
YOU KNOW, THIS CONVERSATION WOULD GO A LOT ***QUICKER*** IF YOU COULD ASTRAL-***PROJECT.***

Yeah, well I can't. I have to physically see my words to send them into your head.
But I'm a shit-hot psychic lens. And that's what I'm here for.
HEY, YOU'RE HERE TO *DIE,* SOUTHERN BOY. SAME AS THE *REST* OF US.
You don't have to look so damn cheerful about it.
YOU'RE NOT HAPPY? I'M *VERY* HAPPY.
THIS IS WHERE WE GET TO SMACK THE *FACE* OF GOD.
NO MORE *WALLS.* NO MORE QUAKING IN *FEAR* AT THE EYE IN THE SKY.
THAT'S A GOOD THING TO *DIE* FOR, ESPEDON.
Yes. It is.
Goodbye, Quadmin. I wish I could have spoken to you just once, face to face.
And I wish that our bodies could have touched as our spirits have done.

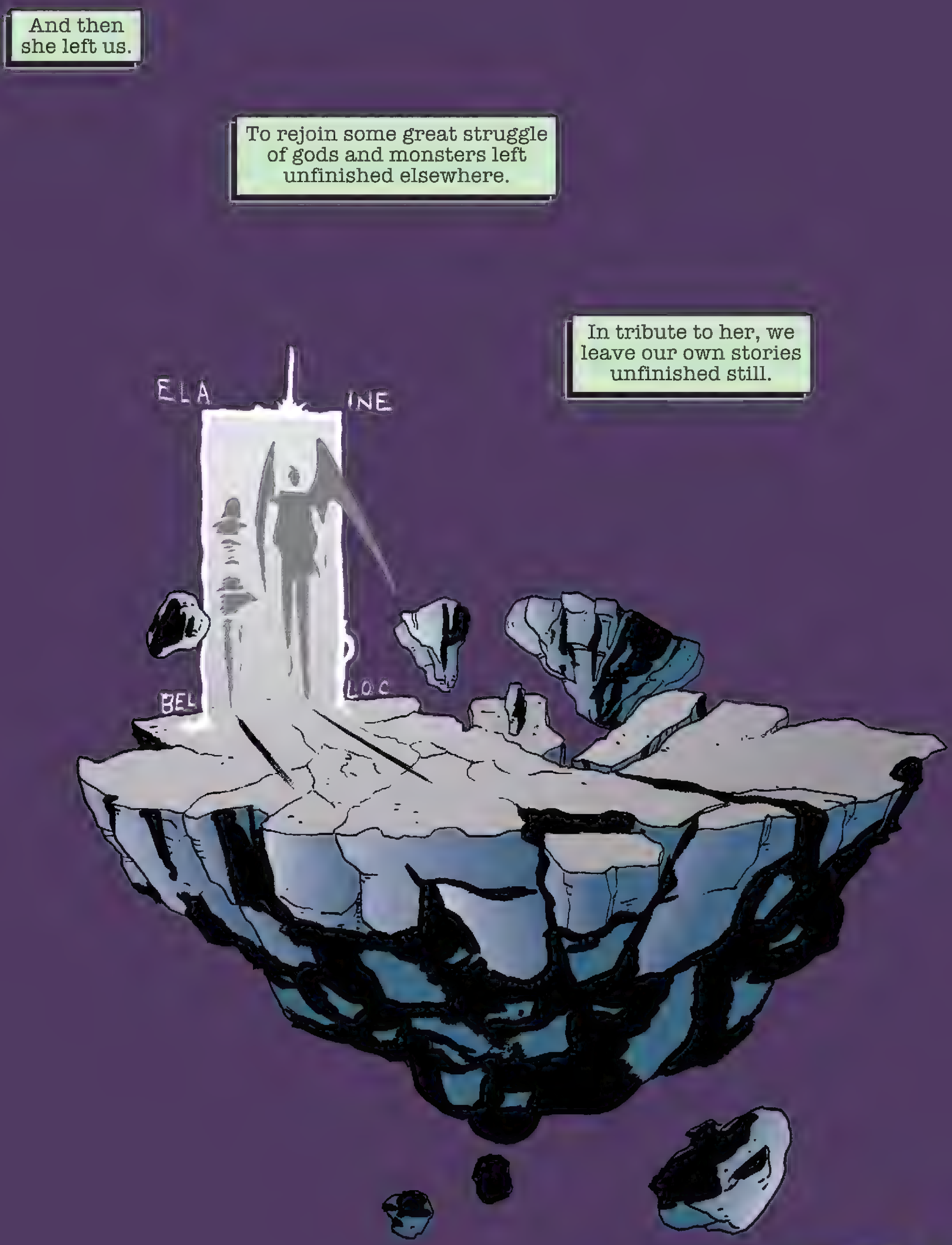
ARE WE ALL MET, TREMOIL?
AYE, SIR. AND ALL READY.
WILL YOU SPEAK TO THEM?
WELL, I WAS GOING TO GIVE A SPEECH OF A SINGLE WORD. "NOW!"
BUT WHY NOT? CERTAINLY MY ORATORY SHOULD PUT THEM IN THE RIGHT MOOD FOR SUICIDE.

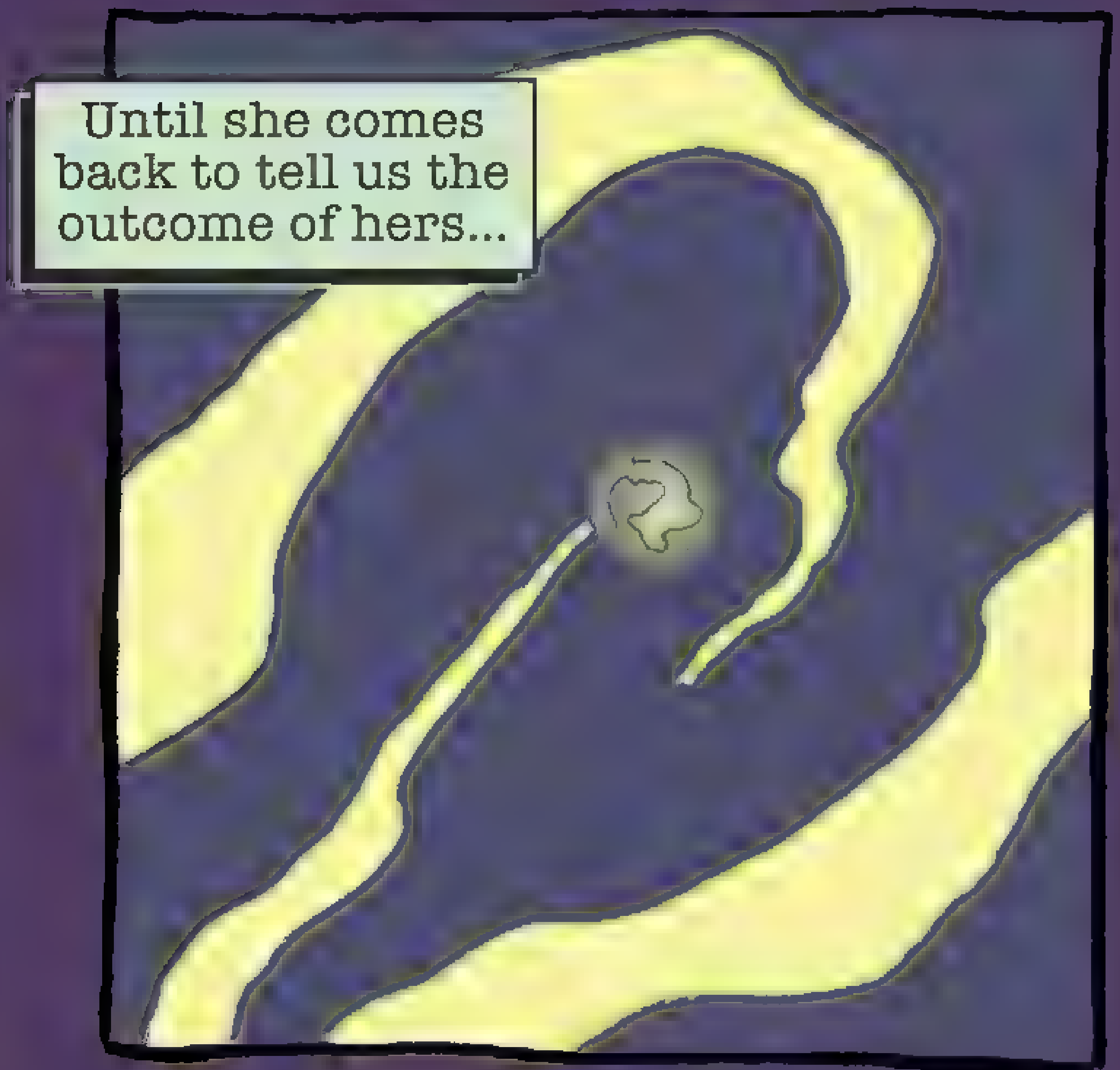
MY FRIENDS, YOU HAVE *COME* HERE TO TAKE PART IN A GREAT *VENTURE.*
TO *KILL* YOURSELVES-- AND AS YOU DIE, TO THROW THE *PAIN* OF YOUR DEATHS AGAINST THE WALL.
A HUNDRED *THOUSAND* MORTAL WOUNDS ARE A GREAT FORCE *INDEED.*
AND I-- YOUR *LENS--* WILL MAGNIFY THEM SO THAT THEY ARE EVEN *GREATER.*
BUT STILL, THE WALL *MIGHT* ENDURE.
WERE IT NOT FOR THE *NORTHERLINGS--* OUR ANCIENT ENEMIES. THEY TOO HAVE CHOSEN A HUNDRED THOUSAND TO *DIE,* AND A LENS TO *FOCUS* THE DEATHS.
THIS, WE HOPE, WILL BE *ENOUGH.*
I DON'T KNOW *ANYTHING* ABOUT ANY OF YOU. YOU MAY BE GREAT HEROES, OR GREAT *ROGUES.*
BUT FOR WHAT YOU DO HERE TODAY, YOU WILL BE *REMEMBERED* UNTIL THE WORLD ENDS.
RAISE YOUR *DAGGERS,* NOW. INTONE THE WORDS OF YOUR *CHOOSING.*
FIX YOUR *MINDS* UPON THE WALL.
AND STR--
TCHANG

TCHANG
TCHANG
TCHANG
TCHANG
OKAY.
YOU'VE *MADE* YOUR POINT.
I'LL TAKE THE WALL DOWN NOW.

THAT LOOKS LIKE *SURRENDER.*
I DON'T *CARE* WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE.
AND I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE FROM *YOU* ABOUT IT.
THAT SOUNDS *PROMISING.*
GO *ON.*
GO ON AND *WHAT?* DRAW THE *MORAL?*
THAT THE LIFE OF *PUPPETS* IS NO LIFE AT ALL?
YOU KNEW THAT *ALREADY.* AND IT ISN'T EVEN THE *POINT.*
YOU JUST WANTED ME TO DO THE *GOD* THING. THE *YAHWEH* DANCE.
SO I'D GET USED TO USING THE *POWER.* SO I'D GET THE *FEEL* OF IT.
AND DO YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT IT *NOW?*
YES, LUCIFER. I'VE *GOT* IT.
THEN PLEASE-- DO THE *HONORS.*

ALL RIGHT.
THIS IS PROBABLY GOING TO LOOK A BIT RAGGED AROUND THE EDGES.
ELA


And then she left us.
To rejoin some great struggle of gods and monsters left unfinished elsewhere.
In tribute to her, we leave our own stories unfinished still.
ELA
INE
BEL
LOC


Until she comes back to tell us the outcome of hers...

KALUTA '04

SO I GO BACK TO THE *CITY.*
TO TELL THE DEVIL I NEED TO GET *FIXED.*
HE DID THE JOB FOR ME ONCE *BEFORE,* BUT IT DIDN'T *TAKE.*
NOW HERE I AM KNOCKED *UP* AGAIN.
AND BY THE *SAME* FUCKING DECK OF CARDS.
HE'S NOT *THERE.*
WE DON'T *SEE* HIM, BUT WE *KNOW* WHEN HE COMES AND GOES.
AFTER A WHILE YOU GET A *SENSE* FOR IT.
YOU'RE JILL *PRESTO.*
THE *SINGER.*

YEAH. I WAS FOR A *WHILE.*
I MADE A *WISH,* AND IT CAME TRUE. BUT YOU SHOULD *NEVER* SIGN A CONTRACT WITHOUT READING THE--
RRRRRMMMMMMM
OH NO!
THEY'RE *BACK!*
YEEEHAAA!
FIVE IF THEY *BLEED!* TEN IF THEY *FALL DOWN!*
GAME *ON!*

The BREACH

part 1 of 3

MIKE CAREY writer
PETER GROSS & RYAN KELLY artists
JARED K. FLETCHER lettering
DANIEL VOZZO colors and separations
MICHAEL W. KALUTA cover painter
MARIAH HUEHNER editor

FIVE EACH! I SLOWED HER DOWN.
TEN!
UKKK!
TEN EACH.
NO ONE SAID THEY COULDN'T FALL DOWN *TWICE.*
HEY.
HOW MUCH DOES *THIS* COUNT FOR?
CRUNCHHH
GAAAHH!

BITCH! FUCKING *BITCH!* JOHN, GET THE *KEROSENE.*
PITCH IT *OVER* HER!
I'M TAKING THIS IN *STRIDE,* YOU UNDERSTAND.
THE THING THAT'S INSIDE ME-- MUCH AS I HATE IT-- HAS ITS *OWN* WAYS OF PROTECTING ITSELF.
YOU'D BETTER NOT *DO* THIS. REALLY.
TCHAH! THANKS FOR THE *ADVICE.*
BUT IT'S A NICE FUCKING *NIGHT* FOR A BARBECUE.
AH! AH! AAAAHH!
WELL, THERE YOU *GO.*
I *TRIED* TO WARN YOU.

OH GOD! OH GOD!
SSSSSSSSSSSSSS
THAT'S ALL IT *TAKES,* REALLY.
WHATEVER KIND OF CRAZY THEY ARE, THEY STILL KNOW TO BE *SCARED.*
BUT THE DAMAGE IS ALREADY *DONE.*
ARE YOU ALL *RIGHT?*
I-- HHHHH--
--I DON'T THINK SO.
NO. I DON'T THINK SO *EITHER.*
IS THERE ANYONE-- YOU KNOW-- WHO I SHOULD *CALL?*

IT DOESN'T MATTER. THIS-- THIS IS JUST A SIGN.
A *SIGN?*
A SYMPTOM. THE WORLD IS-- UNRAVELING-- AND IT'S GOING TO GET A LOT WORSE.
LISTEN. LISTEN TO ME.
YOU HAVE TO GO TO VEGAS AGAIN. TO THE-- FIORENZE.
DEAD BIRDS. AND A MAN SAYING "SPIN IT-- SPIN IT, KID."
THIRTEEN *BLACK* WILL WIN.
BET *EVERYTHING.*
EVERYTHING YOU HAVE--
"NOW YOU SEE THEM AS THEY *ARE.*
"AS WE *ALL* WILL BE, IN THE END."

STRIPPED OF THEIR *DISGUISES.*
IN THE *OPEN,* WITH NOWHERE TO HIDE.
I CANNOT *SAY,* MY DEAR ONES, HOW IT HURTS ME TO SEE THIS. THESE FALSE *PROPHETS* PLAYING ON YOUR FAITH.
WHILE THEY SELL YOU IN *SERVITUDE* TO THE MORNINGSTAR.
BUT-- MAZIKEEN IS OUR *SISTER,* AND BRIADACH OUR *BROTHER.*
WHATEVER THEY'VE *DONE,* MOTHER, IS KINSHIP NOT *STRONGER* THAN ANGER?
KINSHIP IS WHAT THEY *BETRAYED* WHEN THEY LIED TO YOU.
KINSHIP IS WHAT CRIES OUT FOR *VENGEANCE* NOW. THOUGH YOU WEEP FOR IT. THOUGH WE *ALL* WEEP FOR IT.

WHAT SHALL BE *DONE* WITH THEM, MOTHER?
HOW WILL WE *PUNISH* THEM?
THEY WILL RUN THE *GAUNTLET*-- RECEIVING ONE BLOW FROM *EACH* OF YOU.
BECAUSE THEY HAVE *INJURED* EACH OF YOU.
AFTER THAT, YOU MAY DIG A *PIT* AND BURY THEM.
PUT THEM AND ALL THEIR BASE *COUNSEL* OUT OF YOUR SIGHT AND YOUR MINDS *FOREVER.*
SEE, MOTHER HERE IS ONE *MORE* TO BE JUDGED.
A *HUMAN* WOMAN, WHO MAZIKEEN BROUGHT HERE TO BE HER *WHORE.*
IF I NEEDED ANY *FURTHER* PROOF OF BETRAYAL, I SEE IT *HERE.*
TO TAKE A DAUGHTER OF *EVE* INTO HER BED. TO CONSORT SO *OPENLY* WITH OUR ENEMIES!

YOU THINK YOU'VE *BEATEN* HER.
NOBODY BEATS HER. SHE'LL *KILL* YOU.
GIVE HER A SKIN OF *WATER*, AND TURN HER *OUT* INTO THE WASTES.
SHE HAS NO *BUSINESS* HERE.
BYE BYE.
BEATRICE.
SKRRRT

THE *STRIP.* FIRST PACIFIC BANK.
ONE BLOCK UP FROM THE *FIORENZE.*
SURE.
SQUEEEEEEEEE
HOPE YOUR *REENTRY* IS SMOOTHER THAN YOUR TAKEOFF.
HOPE SPRINGS *ETERNAL,* LADY.
'LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I *HEARD.*
DOESN'T MEAN IT'LL GET YOU WHERE YOU'RE GOING.
KLIK

--ECHOES THE FINDINGS OF THE HOWARD LEAGUE **PRISON** CHARITY, WHICH REPORTS AN EIGHT HUNDRED PER CENT **INCREASE** IN PRISONER SUICIDES ACROSS THE U.S..
I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU FEEL LIKE SWITCHING TO A ***MUSIC*** CHANNEL.
I DON'T ***SUPPOSE.***
IN THE POPULATION AT **LARGE,** THOUGH, THE FIGURE IS CONFUSED BY ACTS OF **SELF-MUTILATION** WHICH RESULT IN ACCIDENTAL DEATH. HERE, TOO, INCIDENCE IS RISING BY--
KEE VEG PURE
OR SPICS
NO BLACKS OR SPICS
WHACK
JESUS! I-- I THINK YOU ***HIT*** SOMEONE BACK THERE.
SO WHAT IF I ***DID?***
THERE'S ALWAYS ***MORE*** OF 'EM BEING BORN.
THREE HUNDRED MILLION A ***YEAR.*** YOU BLINK YOUR EYES, AND THERE'S A THOUSAND MORE ***BABIES.***
SO WHAT'S IT ***MATTER?*** WHAT'S IT FUCKING ***MATTER?***

ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO TAKE ALL OF THIS IN *CASH,* MISS PRESTO?
I WIRED *AHEAD.* I WAS TOLD THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY *PROBLEM.*
NO, NO. NO PROBLEM. IT'S JUST-- WELL, THE *AMOUNT--* THE RISK OF--
I'LL BE *FINE.* THANKS.
REFINANCE
MORTG
ATM
THAT'S HIM.
RIGHT *THERE.*
ASINO
THAT'S *GOD.*
RIDING INTO *VEGAS.*

"HE IS TRAMPLING OUT THE *VINTAGE.*
HYAAAAA!
"HE IS PRESSING *WINE* FROM OUT OF THE GRAPES OF WRATH--
"--SO THAT THE LAST *CUP* MAY BE POURED, AND *OFFERED* TO US."

OH MOTHER, YOU HAVE DINED AND SUPPED ON *MADNESS.*
ON *REVELATION.*
AS YOU *WILL.*
BUT WHAT *YOU* SAW WAS ONLY *ONE* EPIPHANY.
THE PAST AND THE FUTURE ARE THE AIR I *BREATHE,* AND I HAVE *SEEN* WHERE THIS GOES.
YOU WILL DESTROY *EVERYTHING.* BUT EVERYTHING IS *NOTHING.*
AND YOU WILL BE THE *QUEEN* OF NOTHING, WHEN THERE IS NOTHING ELSE *LEFT* FOR YOU TO BE.
YOU WILL *LIVE* TO SEE--
GWUUUUH!
ON WITH THE *WORK.*
BEFORE THE *LIGHT* STARTS TO FAIL YOU.

THE FIORENZE. GETTING A LITTLE LATE, NOW. OR AT LEAST THAT'S HOW IT *FEELS.*
BUT IN VEGAS YOU'RE NEVER GONNA SEE A *CLOCK.*
MAKE *ROOM* FOR THE LADY.
HELL, I WAS LEAVING *ANYWAY.*
THANK YOU.
THERE YOU *GO,* MISSY.
HOPE *YOUR* LUCK IS BETTER THAN *MINE.*
I'M LOOKING TO *CHANGE* IT.

SPLATCH
THWUCK
SPLATCH
SPLATCH
THWUCK
THWUCK
NEVER *MIND* THAT. JUST SPIN THE *WHEEL,* KID.
SOME OF US CAME HERE TO *PLAY.*
ALL OF IT.
ALL OF IT ON *RED.*

TABLE'S *CLOSED,* LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.
RIEN NE VA PLUS. NO MORE *BETS.*
TUNK
TUNK
THIRTEEN.
BLACK.
JESUS! HARD *LINES,* LADY.
EASY *COME.*
EASY *GO.*

HELL OF A *STORM.*
YEAH.
THOUGHT I KNEW THE CITY PRETTY *WELL,* BUT SHIT! I NEVER SAW HER LIKE THIS BEFORE.
NEVER SAW A PLAY LIKE *YOURS* BEFORE, EITHER.
BETTING A STACK LIKE *THAT,* KNOWING YOU WERE GONNA *LOSE...*

UNLESS-- AND I COULD BE OUT OF *LINE* HERE-- YOU'RE BETTING ON SOMETHING *ELSE.*
LIKE WHAT?
LIKE I *DUNNO.*
LIKE MAYBE-- THAT ANY GODS WHO LIVE ROUND *HERE* WOULD SOONER HAVE A BIG ROLL ON THE *WHEEL* THAN A FATTED CALF.
IF YOU WERE GONNA MAKE 'EM AN *OFFERING,* I MEAN.
DKNY
HELL OF A STORM.

LIGHTNING! OUT OF A *CLEAR* SKY. THE *MORNINGSTAR*--
THE MORNINGSTAR IS PASSED OUT OF THE *SCHEME* OF THINGS.
CARRY ON WITH YOUR *WORK.*
BUT MOTHER, WE *CAN'T.*
LOOK! LOOK THERE!
SHE'S *GONE.*
MAZIKEEN IS *GONE.*

MW Kaluta '04

VIVA LAS VEGAS.
THE PLACE THAT GREW FROM A HUMBLE MIRAGE INTO A GLORIOUS, CITY-SIZED CON TRICK.
EVEN THE NAME IS A SCAM. YOU SEE ANY MEADOWS HERE? NO, ME NEITHER.
BUT TONIGHT, WITH THE SKY TRYING TO BLOW IT AWAY AND THE DESERT TRYING TO SWALLOW IT WHOLE, IT FEELS LIKE YOU'D ONLY HAVE TO RUB YOUR EYES AND IT WOULD VANISH--
--TO THE TEPID APPLAUSE OF ITS JADED CLIENTELE.

The BREACH

part 2 of 3

MIKE CAREY writer
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MARIAH HUEHNER editor
Based on characters created by
GAIMAN, KIETH, DRINGENBERG

SO YOU *COME* TO US.
YOU COME TO US WITH A *PROPOSITION,* IF I MAY PUT IT IN SUCH A WAY.
SAYS THE GANGSTER GHOST *GOD* THING.
YOU GOT YOURSELF IN *TROUBLE.* NOW YOU WANNA GET YOURSELF FIXED. VEGAS *UNDERSTANDS* THAT, BUT STILL--
OPINION IS KIND OF *DIVIDED.*
DIVIDED? WHAT THE FUCK DOES *THAT* MEAN?
IF I MAY *PUT* IT IN SUCH A WAY.
THERE'S THE OLD FIGHTING SPIRIT, JILLY GIRL. ONLY YOU DON'T WANNA GO FIGHTING *ME,* 'CAUSE I'M YOUR FRIEND.
MY *FRIEND?*
SURE. I'M ON *YOUR* SIDE. I GOT *MONEY* ON YOU, IN A SENSE.
LET'S TAKE A *WALK.*
ASSUMING YOU GOT NOTHING *BETTER* TO DO.

KAROOM
LOOKS LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD, DON'T IT? A STORM THAT STRETCHES ACROSS ALL THE FUCKING REALMS. NICE EFFECT...
"DIVIDED"?
YEAH, I WAS COMING TO THAT.
VEGAS APPRECIATES THE OFFERING YOU MADE. AND HOW YOU MADE IT.
BUT VEGAS ALSO LIKES THE THING THAT'S INSIDE YOU. THE THING THAT SHUFFLES DESTINIES LIKE CARDS.
VERY MUCH, VEGAS LIKES THAT.
HENCE MY PREVIOUS REMARK. VEGAS IS, YOU COULD SAY, OF TWO MINDS ABOUT THIS.
SO WILL YOU HELP ME?
YES OR NO, BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS BULLSHIT.
YES AND NO, IS MORE OR LESS WHAT WE DECIDED. HERE, YOU WANT ONE OF THESE CUBANAS?
I FEEL LIKE I'M ABOUT TO HAVE A KID OF MY OWN.

LUCIFER'S CREATION.
THE ARMED CAMP OF THE *LILIM.*
HAAAAAAH!
DO YOU STILL BELIEVE YOU CAN *DO* THIS, BERIM?
I-- *HAVE--* DONE IT.
LOOK-- *OUTSIDE* AND SEE.
THE GATES WERE TRYING TO *OPEN,* LILITH, TO *CONNECT* TO THIS TIME, AND THIS PLACE.
BUT I HELD THEM *OFF.* AGAIN.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THEY'RE LUCIFER'S GATES?
THEY BORE SOMEONE *ELSE'S* NAME.
ELAINE. ELAINE *BELLOC.*
MICHAEL'S DAUGHTER.
MICHAEL'S--?
YES. WE *MISCALCULATED.*
THEY *DIDN'T* DIE. THEY WENT SOMEWHERE *ELSE,* WHERE WE COULDN'T SEE.
HARD TO *IMAGINE* WHERE SUCH A SOMEWHERE MIGHT *BE.*
THEN WE'LL *FAIL!* ALL OUR PLANS WILL *MISCARRY...*
NO. AS I SAID, I'VE *DELAYED* THEM. HEADED THEM OFF.
THIS *CONTINUES* TO BE A MATTER OF TIME.
AND TIME FAVORS *US.*

TOK
IT'S DONE.
WE'VE NOT TAMPED THE *EARTH* DOWN. OR MADE IT--
I SAID IT'S *DONE.*
OR *I'M* DONE WITH IT, IN ANY CASE. I'M A *SOLDIER,* NOT A FUCKING SEXTON.
NOR *I,* NEITHER.
AND THIS *STORM* IS LIKE TO BLOW US AWAY.
COME ON, REDAK. IVRIMEL IS *RIGHT.* WE'RE FINISHED HERE.
A *MOMENT* MORE.
I LIKE NOT THE THOUGHT OF *FOXES* DIGGING UP THE GRAVE.
THESE THINGS MUST BE DONE *RIGHT.*
THIS IS OUR *BROTHER,* AFTER ALL.
WE'RE *BEHOLDEN.*

IVRIMEL? PASS ME THE *MATTOCK*, THERE!
THIS IS BUT *FOOL'S* WORK WITH THE BACK OF A *SHOVEL*.
KKKHHHH!
KRAKK
WHERE *IS* THE SOT?
LET'S DRAG HIM AWAY BY HIS *HEELS*.
BEFORE WE *CHOKE* ON THIS BLOODY DUST.

COME ON, SCRATCHPOLL.
LET'S GET IN OUT OF THIS, AND DRINK A--
KRAKSH
M--MAZIKEEN! NO!
WE DIDN'T CHOOSE THIS! IT'S NOT-- IT'S NOT--
SHLAKKK
GLKKK
BLOOD FOR BLOOD, BROTHER.
AND MORE TO COME.

WE WALK TO THE EDGE OF *TOWN.*
NOT HARD TO *DO,* IN VEGAS. ANY STREET YOU *LOOK* DOWN, THE DESERT'S THERE.
WAITING FOR ITS *MOMENT.*
THREE HUNDRED *MILES* OF NOTHING, BETWEEN HERE AND GRANTS.
CLEAR ACROSS ARIZONA INTO NEW *MEXICO.* THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE *GOING.*
YOU SEE *THAT?*
THERE'S NOTHING THERE TO *SEE.*
WELL, *NOTHING'S* WHAT I'M TALKIN' ABOUT.
YOU *THINK* SO?
YEAH, I THINK SO. BECAUSE IT'S THE ONLY SHOT IN YOUR *LOCKER,* MISSY.
VEGAS HAS *SPOKEN.* AND IT'S NOT KNOWN FOR GIVING *ANYONE* AN EVEN BREAK.
WE WANT THIS BIRTH TO GO *AHEAD.* BUT WE'RE GIVING YOU A CHANCE TO *SQUARE* IT WITH THE KID BEFORE IT COMES OUT O' YOU.
Y'KNOW, SO IT DON'T COME OUT *FIGHTING.*

IT'S *THEIRS.* IT'S WHAT'S *LEFT* OF THEM. THE BASANOS.
THEY FUCKING ENSLAVED ME! THEY *RODE* ME LIKE A HORSE! YOU THINK I WANT TO GO *BACK* TO THAT?
NO. I DON'T GUESS YOU *WOULD.*
BUT THIS IS THE *DEAL.* SO YOU GET THE FINGERS OFF THE *FABRIC,* MAKE LIKE A GOOD GIRL--
--AND I'LL GIVE YOU THE *STARTING* PRICES.
OW! *SHIT,* OKAY.
GOOD. THANK YOU. SO YOU'RE GONNA GO *THAT* WAY, WHICH IS DUE *EAST.*
SOMEONE'S *WAITING* FOR YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE. BUT YOU DON'T EAT. YOU DON'T DRINK. AND YOU GOTTA MAKE IT BEFORE THE *SUN* COMES UP.
THREE HUNDRED *MILES* IN ONE NIGHT? HOW CAN *ANYONE* DO THAT?
BY *CHEATING,* I GUESS. GONNA BE INTERESTING TO *WATCH,* EITHER WAY.
SEE YOU IN THE *FUNNY* PAPERS.

THERE'S ONLY *ONE* HORSE MISSING. AND ONE SET OF *PRINTS.*
MAZIKEEN.
OF COURSE.
SHE IS AN *IMPONDERABLE,* LILITH. SHE KNOWS THAT YOU'RE *CENTRAL* TO OUR PLANS.
THAT *ALONE* WOULD TELL THE MORNINGSTAR TOO MUCH, IF SHE WERE TO *ENCOUNTER* HIM.
I'LL ASSEMBLE *SEARCH* PARTIES, AND LEAD THEM *MYSELF.*
WE CAN RUN HER *DOWN* BEFORE SHE GOES TOO FAR.
WITH *RESPECT,* NO.
NOW IS WHEN YOU MUST *BIND* YOUR CHILDREN TO OUR CAUSE.
ALL MUST HEAR YOU, AND ALL MUST *SWEAR* TO YOU. THERE'S NO OTHER WAY.

YOU'VE ALSO GOT TO BE HERE TO GREET OUR *ALLIES,* WHEN THEY COME-- SINCE THEY'LL ONLY *ANSWER* TO YOU.
SO *I* WILL DEAL WITH MAZIKEEN.
AND WHEN SHE'S *DEAD,* I'LL RETURN TO YOU.
VERY WELL, BERIM. BUT BE *WARY.*
LET MY *ENEMIES* BE WARY.
I WILL BE *SUDDEN.*
AND *THOROUGH.*

I WALK *ON* THROUGH THE DESERT.
THE STORM DOESN'T TOUCH ME. IT'S NOT *ALLOWED* TO.
BUT I WONDER WHAT *TIME* IT IS, AND HOW LONG I'VE *GOT.*
THEN THE WIND DIES, AND THE *MOON* COMES UP.
AND I'VE GOT AT LEAST A *ROUGH* IDEA.
YOU THINK OF THE DESERT AS A *HOT* PLACE, BUT IT'S GOT A DIFFERENT FACE THAT IT WEARS AT *NIGHT.*
AFTER A WHILE, THE COLD STARTS TO SEEP RIGHT *THROUGH* ME.
FIGURES. I CAN'T BE *HURT.* THE MONSTER INSIDE ME WILL MAKE SURE OF *THAT.*
BUT THE COLD WILL SLOW ME *DOWN*-- WHICH IS WHAT IT *WANTS.*
"YOU DON'T *EAT.*"
"YOU DON'T *DRINK.*"
Flamingo
LOS VEGAS
YOU KNOW--
--HE DIDN'T SAY A *WORD* ABOUT NOT SMOKING.

HEYA, PRETTY *BIRD.*
MAY I SHARE YOUR *FIRE* THIS COLD, COLD NIGHT?
UMM-- THAT'D BE GREAT. IF I HAD ONE.
BUT I *SAW* YOU MAKE A FIRE, WITH YOUR *MAGIC.*
LOOK *BEHIND* YOU.

IT IS *GOOD* TO SHARE HEAT ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS.
YEAH. I SUPPOSE.
AND THIS IS A VERY GOOD FIRE. IF THE *SMOKE* DOESN'T MAKE YOU TOO DROWSY.
BUT *BETTER* IS TO SHARE THE BODY'S HEAT.
MY *LOINS* AS I LOOK AT YOU ARE HOTTER THAN *ANY* FIRE.
MMMMM.
MMMPH?
HEY, WHAT IS THIS?
YOU WERE A *DOG* A MINUTE AGO! NOW YOU'RE COMING *ON* TO ME?
I WAS A *COYOTE.* I STILL AM, THOUGH I WEAR A *MAN'S* SKIN.
BUT IN *ANY* SHAPE, MY SEED IS STRONG.

YOU KNOW HOW THE COWBIRD THROWS OTHER CHICKS OUT OF THEIR OWN NEST?
EVEN SO, MY SEED THROWS OUT OTHER MEN'S SEED. FUCK WITH ME, AND YOU WILL BEAR MY CHILDREN ONLY.
YOU KNOW, THAT'S A GREAT LINE. IF YOU KEEP TRYING, YOU'RE BOUND TO FIND SOME GIRL WHO'LL FALL FOR IT.
THEN YOU REFUSE ME?
OH YEAH.
EVEN THOUGH I DANCED A CHARM AROUND YOU, TO MAKE YOU DESIRE ME.
THE GAMBLER SAID THAT YOU WERE CLEVER.
VERY WELL. I COULD FORCE YOU--
YOU COULD TRY!
--BUT YOU BEAT ME FAIRLY. I WOULD BE SHAMED.
SO I WILL SPEED YOU INSTEAD. THE GAMBLER SAID THAT THIS WAS WHAT YOU WANTED.
BUT I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN, JILL PRESTO. AT THE ENDING.
BECAUSE THERE WILL BE AN ENDING.
SOON.

"SO SOME OF YOU ARE *UNHAPPY."*
"SOME OF YOU THINK I'VE *CHANGED..."*
BUT I HAVE *NOT* CHANGED. I AM ONLY WHAT I *EVER* WAS.
MOTHER-- *UNDERSTAND* US--
ALWAYS WE HAVE BEEN ONE TRIBE. ONE *FAMILY.*
NOW WE FIGHT AND *KILL* EACH OTHER. IN THE NAME OF A CAUSE YOU HAVE YET TO *EXPLAIN* TO US.
WE *HONOR* YOU, BUT-- MANY OF US NEED A BETTER REASON TO *FOLLOW.*
THE REASON IS WHAT IT *ALWAYS* WAS, MISRAN.
THE WAR THAT *HEAVEN* WANTED. THAT HEAVEN *STARTED.*
DID THEY NOT DENY US THE *GARDEN?*
AND THEN THE *CITY,* EVEN THOUGH OUR HANDS *RAISED* IT?

OTHER NATIONS ARE BUILT ON A *DREAM.* OR AN *ACCIDENT.*
OURS-- *ONLY* OURS-- ON A GRIEVANCE.
HAVE YOU NOT *HATED* HEAVEN FOR A THOUSAND, AND THEN A THOUSAND GENERATIONS OF *MAN?*
YOU *KNOW* WE HAVE.
GOOD, THEN.
FOR I AM *RETURNED* TO TELL YOU THAT YOUR WAITING IS OVER. HEAVEN HANGS BY A *THREAD.*
AND WE ARE THE BLADE THAT WILL *CUT* THAT THREAD.
WE *CAN'T* TOPPLE THE SILVER CITY.
NOT *ALONE.*
DID I *SAY* THAT WE WOULD BE ALONE?
IF THAT IS YOUR *ONLY* OBJECTION, MY SWEET SONS, MY PUISSANT DAUGHTERS--
--COME. AND BE *SATISFIED.*

THE CANYON DE CHELLY.
NORTHERN ARIZONA.
GRAN'DAD! SHE'S *HERE!*
SHE'S *COME!*

GET OUT OF MY WAY. I'VE ONLY GOT UNTIL-- THE SUN--
IT'S ALL RIGHT. THIS IS WHERE YOU WERE MEANT TO COME.
--UNTIL THE SUN--
OH JESUS.
I DIDN'T MAKE IT.
GRANDAD! HELP!
I'M COMING, I'M COMING.
DON'T LET HER FALL.
SHE THINKS SHE FAILED.
SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHERE SHE IS.
IT'S BEST SHE SLEEPS, IN ANY CASE.
BOIL THAT WATER UP, RACHEL.
HER REAL TRIAL IS STILL TO COME.

WHERE ARE WE *GOING?*
MOTHER SPOKE OF *ALLIES.* STRONG ONES, WHO'LL HELP US *STRIKE* AT HEAVEN.
MADNESS! *WHAT* ALLIES?
MY CHILDREN, I SAW A *VISION* A LONG TIME AGO.
I WAS IN THIS PLACE, AND A *HOST* DESCENDED TO MEET ME.
SO I SET ABOUT TO *FORGE* THIS HOST. *ANGELS,* BUT NOT OF HEAVEN.
I MET THEIR FATHER-- A *SON* OF HEAVEN-- IN THE SOFT PLACES. WE *COUPLED* THERE, AND I CONCEIVED.
NOT ONCE, BUT *MANY* TIMES.
AN *ANGEL?*
BUT ANGELS *CANNOT--*
THEY CANNOT, BUT *I* CAN. EVEN A *BREATH* MAKES MY WOMB QUICKEN.

THESE ARE YOUR BROTHERS AND YOUR SISTERS.
GIVE THEM *WELCOME.*

IN CABARET, SOMETIMES, WHEN YOUR BACK'S AGAINST THE WALL, YOU'LL THROW IN A WEAK ACT TO FILL UP YOUR BILL.
SO WHAT YOU DO IS, YOU MAKE IT INTO A STUMBLE.
WHICH MEANS, YOU PLAY IT SECOND.
AFTER A BARNSTORMING OPENER, SO THE AUDIENCE ARE FEELING SO GOOD THEY COAST RIGHT ON PAST IT.
MAYBE THAT'S ALL THIS WAS.
GOD MADE THE WORLD, AND THE FIRST FIVE BILLION YEARS OR SO JUST RATTLED ALONG LIKE A FREIGHT TRAIN.
STARS.
PLANETS.
SENTIENT LIFE.
RECORDABLE DVD.
BUT THEN GOD TAKES HIS BOW, AND SUDDENLY WE'RE HERE.
STUMBLE.
THE SHOW SEEMS ALL SET TO FALL APART.
AND WE HAVE NO FUCKING IDEA WHO'S NEXT IN THE BILLING.

The BREACH

part 3 of 3

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WHOA THERE, HORSEY!
THAT'S AS FAR AS I *GO* ON A FIRST DATE.
AAA!
I WAS WASHING YOU *CLEAN*. FOR THE *BLESSING*.
MAYBE SO.
WHERE AM *I?*
IN MY GRANDAD'S *HOGAN*. PLEASE. THAT-- THAT REALLY *HURTS*.
I WON'T TOUCH YOU AGAIN IF YOU DON'T *WANT* ME TO, JILL.
THE GUY WITH THE *CIGAR*-- HE SAID IF I MADE IT ACROSS THE DESERT, I'D FIND SOME PEOPLE WHO COULD *HELP* ME.
AND BLUE FLINT GIRL *WARNED* US THAT YOU'D BE COMING.
TOLD US WHAT YOU'D *NEED*.
STINKS OF *SETUP*.
DOESN'T IT?

AH, YOU ARE *AWAKE.* GOOD.
AND I GUESS YOU'D BE *GRANDAD?*
I AM HOSTEEN *SAM BEGAI.* YOU ARE *WELCOME* IN MY HOUSE.
YOU'VE BOILED THE *WATER,* RACHEL?
YES, GRANDAD. AND I SET THE *SAND* POTS OUT, TOO.
BLESS YOU. THEN I THINK THAT WE ARE *READY.*
HEY. READY FOR *WHAT?*
YOU WANT TO TALK *TO* ME INSTEAD OF *AROUND* ME?
READY FOR THE *JOURNEY.*
YOU'RE *GOING* SOMEWHERE?
NO. BUT *YOU* ARE. AND MY GRANDDAUGHTER WILL GO *WITH* YOU.
HENCE THE *PICNIC* BASKET?
IT WILL BE NO *PICNIC,* JILL PRESTO.
YOU MUST TALK TO YOUR *CHILD,* BEFORE SHE IS *BORN.*
SHE LIES *BREECH.*
SHE INTENDS TO *KILL* YOU AS SHE COMES INTO THE WORLD.

LUCIFER'S CREATION.
THE ARMED CAMP OF THE *LILIM.*
MOTHER, WHAT *ARE* THEY? WHERE HAVE THEY *COME* FROM?
I *TOLD* YOU, MISRAN. THEY ARE YOUR BROTHERS AND YOUR SISTERS.
CONCEIVED AND BORN TO ME AND *SANDALPHON* IN THE SOFT PLACES *OUTSIDE* OF TIME.
BUT THAT CANNOT *BE.* IT IS A *MIRACLE.*
YES. IT IS *MY* MIRACLE.
THE QUICKENING *POWER* THAT LIVES IN ME AS FIRST *WOMAN,* OLDER THAN EVE.
LILITH.
SANDALPHON.
I HAVE *MISSED* YOU.
HAVE YOU? *I* HAVE ENDURED OUR PARTING VERY *WELL.*

WHAT WE HAVE DONE WAS NOT DONE FOR *LOVE'S* SAKE, BUT TO TOPPLE HEAVEN. YOU WANTED AN *ARMY.*
I HAVE GIVEN YOU *TWO.*
AND NOW IT *BEGINS,* MY DEAR ONES. NOW EONS OF *INSULT* WILL FINALLY BE AVENGED.
GOD AND HIS ANGELS WILL *BLEED* FOR WHAT THEY HAVE *DONE* TO US.
THIS IS YOUR *MOTHER.*
SHOW HER *RESPECT.*
WE MARCH ON THE *SILVER CITY*-- FROM THE PLAINS THAT STAND BELOW ITS *EASTERN* ASPECT.
I PRESUME YOU *KNOW* THE WAY.

SHE FACES THE *EAST.*
HEYA! SHE FACES THE *EAST.*
SHE FACES THE EAST AND SHE *EATS.*
RIGHT. *WHAT* DOES SHE EAT, EXACTLY?
IT'S LOPHOPHORA. *PEYOTE.*
OH, FUCKING *WONDERFUL.*
MY FETUS WANTS TO LAUNCH A *COMMANDO* RAID AGAINST ME FROM THE INSIDE.
YOU REALLY THINK GETTING *HIGH* IS AN ADEQUATE *RESPONSE?*
THERE IS NO *OTHER* WAY FOR YOU TO GO WHERE YOU *MUST* GO.
IT IS HARD TO PASS A *NEEDLE* THROUGH ITS OWN *EYE,* JILL PRESTO.
YOU *TOO,* RACHEL.
THANKS, GRANDAD.
EUGH! DOES SHE WASH IT DOWN WITH A SHOT OF *TEQUILA,* BY ANY CHANCE?

SHE CLOSES HER *EYES.*
HEYA! SHE CLOSES HER *EYES.*
SHE CLOSES HER *EYES* TO SEE THE ROAD.
AND IT *OPENS* BEFORE HER.
INTO THE EAST SHE *RISES* TO MEET IT.
OUT OF THE EAST IT RISES TO *MEET* HER.
TO PASS HER AND *RETURN.*
ALWAYS IT PASSES HER. ALWAYS IT *RETURNS.*
HEYA! SHE FACES THE *EAST.*
AND IT *OPENS.*
AND IT *RISES.*
AND SHE *WALKS.*

WHOA!
SHIT!
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
I-- I NEARLY *FELL.*
IT'S ALL RIGHT, JILL. I'VE *GOT* YOU.
FUCK! I'M FEELING A BIT *DIZZY.*
WERE WE SOMEWHERE *ELSE* JUST NOW?
MY *GRANDFATHER'S* HOUSE.
BUT NOW WE'VE FOUND THE *ROAD.*
OH YEAH. THE ROAD.
AND WE'VE GOT TO *WALK* IT.
RIGHT.
I THINK I HAD TOO MUCH TO *DRINK* OR SOMETHING.
I HOPE IT'S NOT TOO *FAR.*
NO. IT REALLY *ISN'T.*

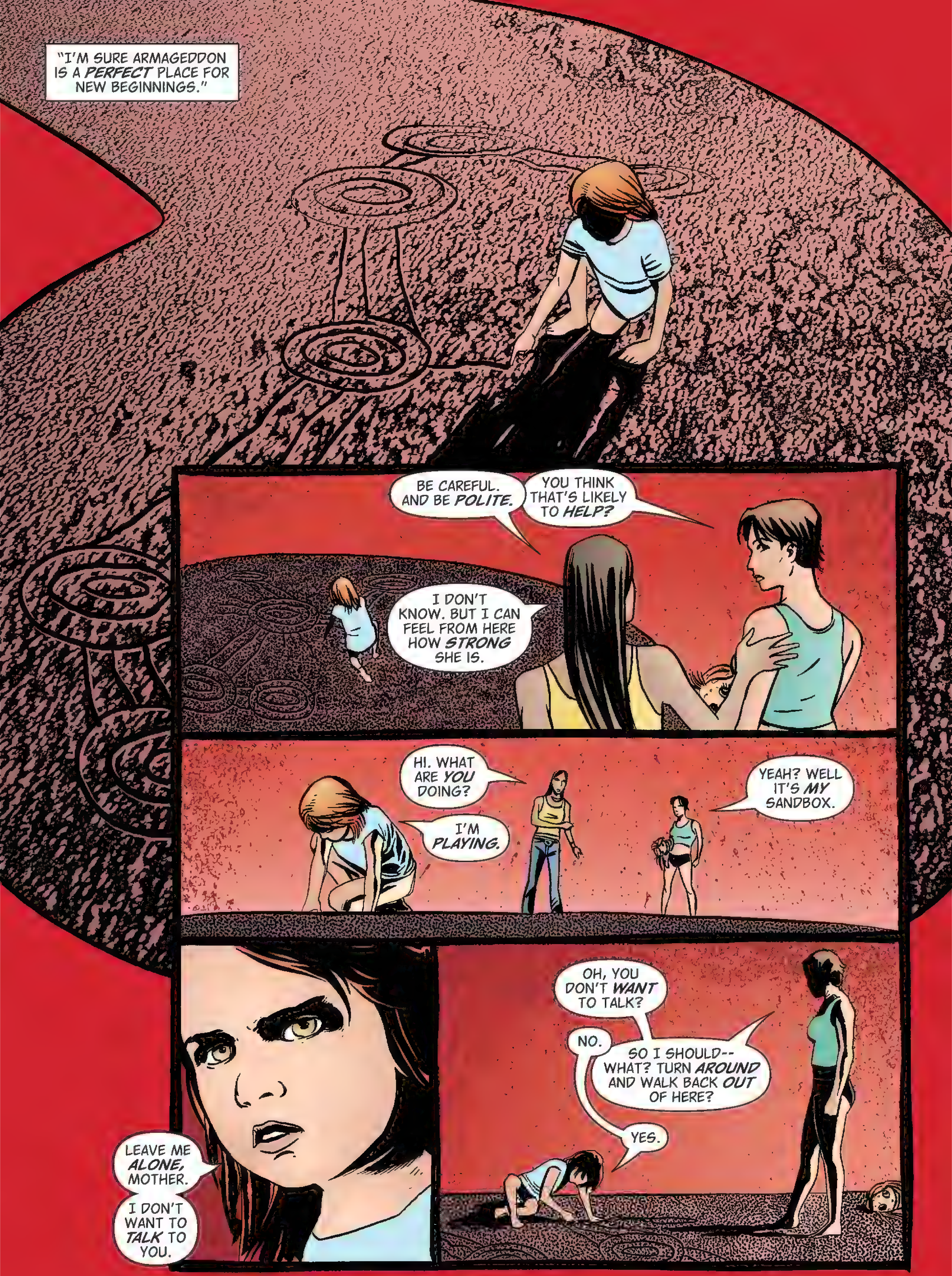
"IN A WAY--"
"--WE'RE ALREADY *THERE.*"

THE SILVER CITY.
URIEL?
COUSIN?
ZONAQUEL. PLEASE. LEAVE ME BE.
I WILL NOT. THIS BROODING UNMANS YOU.
WE SIT IN COUNCIL, AND YOU ARE CALLED FOR. WILL YOU COME?
TO WHAT END?
TO DEBATE THE CRISIS. THE UNRAVELING OF THE WORLDS.
NOW THAT MICHAEL AND LUCIFER HAVE MISCARRIED, WE NEED A NEW PLAN.
A PLAN THAT WILL SUCCEED WHERE THE MORNINGSTAR AND MICHAEL HAVE FAILED?
I FEAR, COUSIN, THAT NOTHING IS LEFT NOW BUT TO MAKE OUR PEACE WITH DISSOLUTION.
BUT BY ALL MEANS LET US DEBATE IT, TOO.
IF NOTHING ELSE, IT PASSES THE TIME.

FUCK.
BE CAREFUL.
IF YOU WALK OFF THE PATH, YOU'LL NEVER FIND IT AGAIN.
LOOK AT THIS. I HAD THIS DOLL WHEN I WAS FIVE YEARS OLD.
HER NAME WAS MELANIE.
THIS PLACE ISN'T KANSAS, IS IT, RACHEL?
NO.
IT ISN'T EVEN NEW MEXICO. NOT ANYMORE.
IT'S YOU, JILL. IT'S YOUR WOMB.
THAT'S WHY MY GRANDAD COULDN'T COME. HE'S NOT ALLOWED TO WALK THIS ROAD.

NEITHER ARE *YOU*, NAVAJO WITCH!
OW!
WHA--?
SHE DOESN'T *WANT* YOU HERE! *EITHER* OF YOU!
SHE'LL TEAR YOU INTO *PIECES* IF YOU GO ANY FURTHER!
LET *GO* OF ME!
MIND IF I *BORROW* THIS, HUGO?
NO! JILL, CA VA PAS, HEIN? CA VA *POINT!* YOU--
NICE *SEEING* YOU AGAIN, SCUMBAG.
ABRACA-FUCKING-DABRA.
VOOOOSH
YOU OKAY?
Y--YEAH. *THANK* YOU.
THEN LET'S KEEP *MOVING*. I THINK I *GET* THIS NOW.
THE TRICK IS, YOU BELIEVE IN *EVERYTHING* OR *NOTHING*.
IT WORKS *EITHER* WAY.

IT IS HARD TO THINK OF YOU AS MY *BROTHER.*
SAY *HALF*-BROTHER, RATHER. BUT THEN, THE LILIM ARE A *RACE* OF HALF-BROTHERS, FROM WHAT I HEAR.
MY NAME IS *MAYEL.*
HOW WILL WE *KNOW* WHEN WE HAVE REACHED OUR DESTINATION, MAYEL?
MOTHER SAYS THAT THERE WILL BE A *SIGN.* A GREAT *LIGHT.*
A GREAT LIGHT? AND WHAT WILL WE *SEE* BY IT?
ARMAGEDDON.
THE PLAIN THAT LIES UNDER *HEAVEN* IS CALLED *ARMAGEDDON.*
IT *RESONATES* THAT NAME, DOES IT NOT?


"I'M SURE ARMAGEDDON IS A *PERFECT* PLACE FOR NEW BEGINNINGS."
BE CAREFUL. AND BE *POLITE.*
YOU THINK THAT'S LIKELY TO *HELP?*
I DON'T KNOW. BUT I CAN FEEL FROM HERE HOW *STRONG* SHE IS.
HI. WHAT ARE *YOU* DOING?
I'M *PLAYING.*
YEAH? WELL IT'S *MY* SANDBOX.
LEAVE ME *ALONE,* MOTHER.
I DON'T WANT TO *TALK* TO YOU.
OH, YOU DON'T *WANT* TO TALK?
NO.
SO I SHOULD-- WHAT? TURN *AROUND* AND WALK BACK *OUT* OF HERE?
YES.

HEY, THIS IS *ME*. THIS IS *MY* BODY.
SEE THE *ARROW?* YOU ARE RIGHT-- FUCKING-- *HERE!*
SO YOU DO *NOT* GET TO TELL ME WHERE TO GO, OR WHAT TO *SAY*.
YOU WILL FUCKING WELL HEAR ME *OUT!*
OH, JEEZ.
YOU'RE LIKE-- SOME KIND OF *EGG* THAT GOT LAID INSIDE ME. LIKE *FLIES* LAY THEIR EGGS IN MEAT.
I JUST WANT YOU TO GET THE HELL *OUT*. THAT'S *ALL* I WANT.
I *WILL!* I *WILL* GO!
AND YOU'LL BE *SORRY* WHEN I DO.
BECAUSE YOU'LL *DIE*.
THAT'S ALL YOU KNOW HOW TO *DO*, ISN'T IT? RIP THINGS *APART*.
WELL *FUCK* YOU. FUCK HOWEVER MANY OF YOU THERE *ARE*.
JILL. HEY, JILL! THIS ISN'T *HELPING*.

I WAS *RAPED* BY A DECK OF CARDS. YOU UNDERSTAND THAT? YOU'RE THE PRODUCT OF A *RAPE.*
AND IF I COULD HAVE GOTTEN TO YOU WITH A BENT *COATHANGER,* YOU'D BE DEAD. YOU'D BE FUCKING *DEAD!*
YOU SHOULD SHUT *UP* NOW. YOU'VE SAID *ENOUGH.*
I'M TELLING THE *TRUTH!*
YOU'RE COMMITTING *SUICIDE.*
LITTLE GIRL--
NOEMA.
NOEMA. I THINK YOU AND YOUR *MOM* GOT OFF TO A BAD--
LEAVE ME *ALONE.*
YEAH, WELL I *WILL.* BUT I WANT YOU TO *TALK* TO EACH OTHER FIRST.
I WANT YOU TO EXPLAIN WHAT IT IS YOU'RE *SCARED* OF.
I'M *NOT* SCARED.
YES YOU ARE. YOU THINK I HAVEN'T SEEN *SCARED* BEFORE?
YOU'RE ALMOST *PEEING* YOURSELF.
SHE WANTS TO *KILL* ME. SHE *SAID* IT.
SHE WANTS TO *KILL* ME LIKE SHE KILLED MY *BROTHER.*

WHAT?
HER *BROTHER?*
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
YES! MY BROTHER *EIKON!*
YOUR BROTHER TRIED TO *BRAINWASH* ME. HE TRIED TO MAKE ME *LOVE* HIM.
WHAT I DID TO HIM WAS PURE *SELF-DEFENSE.*
WHY DID HE HAVE TO *MAKE* YOU?
HE WAS *YOURS.* YOU SHOULD HAVE LOVED HIM BECAUSE HE WAS *YOURS.*
IT-- IT DIDN'T *FEEL* THAT WAY.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT IT WAS *LIKE.* WITH THE BASANOS I WAS *HELPLESS.*
THEY *TORTURED* ME. THEY DID *THIS* TO ME.
THEY MADE ME INTO A-- A *TOY.*
I KILLED EIKON BECAUSE I COULDN'T THINK OF ANY *OTHER* WAY TO GET FREE.
SKIP IT. I DIDN'T COME HERE TO BEG. *COME* ON, RACHEL, MAKE WITH THE RUBY *SLIPPERS.*

IF I *LET* YOU BE FREE--
--DO YOU THINK YOU'D LOVE *ME?*
WHAT?
IF I *LET* YOU BE FREE--
NO, I *HEARD* YOU. I JUST DIDN'T *BELIEVE* IT.
TRUTH? RIGHT NOW I FIND YOU ABOUT AS LOVABLE AS A *TAPEWORM.*
BUT-- HOW CAN I *KNOW?* HOW CAN I *ANSWER* THAT?
NOEMA, IS THERE A WAY FOR YOU TO BE BORN THAT *DOESN'T* KILL JILL?
THEN MAYBE THE TWO OF YOU COULD HANG *LOOSE* AND SEE WHAT *DEVELOPS.*
IF I SET MY *POWER* ASIDE-- JUST AS I WAS COMING OUT-- I COULD BE LIKE *ANY* BABY COMING OUT.
BUT THEN IF YOU WANTED TO *HURT* ME-- THERE'D BE A FEW SECONDS WHEN YOU'D BE *ABLE* TO.

WILL YOU PROMISE *NOT* TO HURT HER, NOEMA?
WHAT KIND OF A QUESTION IS *THAT?*
WHAT WOULD IT EVEN MEAN IF I *SAID* THAT? IT'S JUST *WORDS.*
WELL, THE ONLY WAY THIS IS GOING TO *WORK* IS IF YOU TWO DECIDE TO *TRUST* EACH OTHER.
WILL YOU *PROMISE?*
YEAH. OKAY. I-- I *PROMISE.* IF YOU LET ME LIVE, I WON'T *HURT* YOU.
HURTING YOU WASN'T THE *POINT.*
HEY, THIS IS GOING TO SOUND *STUPID,* BUT-- IF YOU LIKE *DOLLS--*
--THIS ONE'S CALLED *MEL.*
THANK YOU, MOTHER. I'LL *THINK* ABOUT WHAT WE'VE SAID.
BUT I NEED TO BE *BORN* NOW--
--SO YOU SHOULD PROBABLY WAKE *UP.*

NUUUUH!
WHAT HAPPENED, RACHEL? WHAT *PASSED* BETWEEN THEM?
GRANDAD! WELL, THEY-- THEY *TALKED,* AND--
OH JESUS.
ARE YOU *OKAY,* JILL?
NO, I'M IN FUCKING *AGONY.* GUUUUH!
I THINK SHE'S *COMING.*
AND I THINK THE--
...
--THE TRUCE IS *OVER.* OH GOD!
GRANDAD, WHAT SHALL WE *DO?*
HOLD HER *HAND,* RACHEL. I HAVE TO SEE IF THE BABY HAS *TURNED.*
HOWEVER IT GOES, THIS WILL BE *QUICK* NOW.

THERE. THAT IS THE LIGHT I *PROMISED* YOU.
AND THIS IS OUR *HOUR*. THE TIME *FORETOLD*.

"ALL THINGS COME TOGETHER.
"ALL THINGS ARE POISED, AS WAS INTENDED.
"AND NOW WE PUSH."
The End

"Lucifer's adventures on Earth following his exit from Hell are methodical and patient, poetic in their simplicity and always underlined with a sense of menace."

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"The throne is empty
and we are orphans.
What shall avail us now?"

So laments the Heavenly host, left behind by God to ponder His departure. For their elder brother Lucifer Morningstar, however, the disappearance of Yahweh brings to mind a more practical concern — survival, both for himself and, secondarily, his Father's creation.

As chaos rushes to fill the vacuum of God's absence, those who mark themselves as wronged by Heaven prepare to storm the Primum Mobile and smash its palaces to rubble. But even if the angels of the Silver City can hold their walls, they cannot defend them against the greater threat that has just awoken, hungry to fulfill the terrible dictates of its nature. Only Lucifer can see what is coming to Yggdrasil, the World Tree, and what will happen at its roots when it arrives. The Hour of the Wolf is at hand, and its echoes threaten to shatter the foundations of Lucifer's cosmos as well as our own.

That, the Lightbringer will not allow.

Emerging from the pages of Neil Gaiman's groundbreaking series THE SANDMAN, the Fallen One traces a new path in LUCIFER BOOK FOUR, written by Mike Carey and illustrated by Peter Gross, Ryan Kelly, P. Craig Russell, Marc Hempel and Ronald Wimberly. Collecting issues 46-61 of the Eisner Award-nominated series, this volume also features a new introduction by Peter Gross.

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ZONE